

**Public Health Graduate Group  
Policies and Procedures**

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## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Aims and Scope**

Mission Statement: The mission of the Public Health Graduate Group at UC Merced is to promote and protect health in the San Joaquin Valley and the world through our research and the training of the next generation of public health professionals and leaders. Public Health at UC Merced is a vibrant and collegial intellectual community, marked by outstanding scholarship and participation in interdisciplinary communities of inquiry.

The Graduate Group in Public Health at UC Merced offers a degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Public Health. The doctoral program is full-time and is designed to train students in research careers in both higher education and public and private agencies outside of academia. Public Health Ph.D. students have the option to obtain a Master of Science in Public Health (MSPH) degree, either en route to the Ph.D. degree (non-terminal), or in lieu of a Ph.D. degree (terminal) if a student exits the graduate program prior to fulfilling the Ph.D. requirements.

As additional policies and procedures for the Graduate Group are discussed and voted on in Graduate Group meetings, approved policies and procedures (and any amendments thereto) will be added to the Policies & Procedures document on a once-annual basis.

### **1.2 Graduate Policies and Procedures**

In addition to the Public Health Graduate Group policies and procedures contained herein, important information on campus-wide Graduate policies and procedures for faculty and students is contained within the Graduate Policies & Procedures Handbook (<https://graduatedivision.ucmerced.edu/current-students/policies-procedures>).

### **1.3 General Committees**

The three general committees are the Executive Committee, the Curriculum & Education Policy Committee, and the Admissions/Fellowships Committee. Details on the formation, composition, roles, and responsibilities of each Committee can be found in the Public Health Graduate Group Bylaws (see Article V).

#### *1.3.1 Executive Committee*

The administration of the Graduate Group and its activities will be vested in the Graduate Group Executive Committee (GGEC). Formation, composition, roles and responsibilities of the Executive Committee are described in Article V of the Public Health Graduate Group Bylaws.

In each academic year, the Executive Committee is permitted to allocate a portion of annual Graduate Group funds ( $\leq 1/4$  of the total budget, in increments of  $\leq \$1,000$ ) at its discretion, without approval of the broader Graduate Group.

The Executive Committee will be responsible for making annual student nomination and award decisions on internal UC Merced Graduate Division fellowships (e.g., the campus-wide dissertation fellowships, the Central Valley dissertation fellowship, etc.). If a majority of GGEC members have a conflict of interest with respect to these fellowship decisions, or if a tied vote occurs, an ad hoc committee will be convened by the Graduate Chair to make a decision.

The Executive Committee also makes a recommendation to the entire Graduate Group for how to distribute annual USAP funds. The Graduate Group then votes on the recommendation.

#### *1.3.2 Curriculum and Education Policy Committee*

The function of the Graduate Curriculum and Education Policy Committee is to take whatever action is necessary to act on behalf of the Group during the year to define and implement the program leading to the relevant graduate degree(s). The Committee is charged with establishing and maintaining documentation on the Public Health Graduate Group curriculum, and the Committee will periodically prepare for campus reviews of the Public Health Graduate Group, including the seven-year review. The Committee, in consultation with the Group Faculty, will

coordinate and document proposed changes in programmatic requirements of the Group program, and present proposed changes to the voting body and the Graduate Council.

The Committee will also review proposals for new graduate courses to be offered by the Public Health Graduate Group. This responsibility includes reviewing proposed course content, programmatic contribution, overlap with other courses, and resource implications, as well as evaluating whether the addition of the course might necessitate WSCUC Substantive Change Review of the program, as follows:

1. The Graduate Curriculum and Education Committee will convene once per semester to discuss proposed new courses. At least 3 weeks before the scheduled meeting, any newly proposed courses will be sent to the Chair of the Committee with the following information [program will]:
  - Name of course and proposed units
  - Topic category: Methods or substantive
  - Writing intensive: Yes or no
  - A brief description of the course summary and objectives
2. The Chair then sends these proposed course forms to Committee members, so they have approx. 2 weeks prior to meeting to review the proposals. When the Committee reviews, they will weigh the following factors:
  - Existing curriculum requirements and courses taught
  - Number of faculty who could teach the course after it is developed
  - Number of courses the Public Health program currently offers in the methods or content/topic area; and, if it's a methods course, what proportion of courses are currently methods courses
  - For the faculty member who is proposing, the number of electives that are currently in their rotation to teach
3. Proposed courses recommended by majority vote of the committee will be circulated to the Grad Exec Committee for review and further discussion, before being circulated among the broader PH faculty for discussion during a faculty meeting. Proposed courses will be voted on by the faculty and the lead faculty of approved courses will be invited to develop CRFs to submit for campus approval.
4. The program's course configuration will be assessed based on (a) faculty's teaching schedules (as a general rule, Public Health faculty teach 2 undergrad/1 grad course and 1 elective out of 3), and (b) the general strategy that the Public Health program courses are comprised of 2/3<sup>rd</sup>s substantive courses and 1/3<sup>rd</sup> methods courses.

Once approved, the Graduate Group Chair or their designee registers the Group's approval by completing the "Department" step in Curriculog. More details on campus-wide course approval policy can be found here: [https://senate.ucmerced.edu/sites/senate.ucmerced.edu/files/page/documents/gc\\_course\\_approval\\_policy\\_june2020\\_0.pdf](https://senate.ucmerced.edu/sites/senate.ucmerced.edu/files/page/documents/gc_course_approval_policy_june2020_0.pdf)

Further details on the formation, administration, roles, and responsibilities of the Curriculum and Education Policy Committee can be found in the Public Health Graduate Group Bylaws (Article V, section 2). The Executive Committee may absorb the duties of the Curriculum and Education Policy Committee as needed.

### *1.3.3 Admissions/Fellowships Committee*

The Admissions/Fellowship Committee is charged with the development of recruiting materials for the Graduate Group, reviewing recommendations for admissions, adhering to Graduate Division and departmental admissions policies and procedures, making recommendations for admissions to the Dean of the Graduate Division, and exploring graduate student support mechanisms. The Admissions/Fellowships Committee also recommends the allocation of intramural financial assistance to the GGEC, which makes the final decisions or recommendations to an awarding body as appropriate. Recommendations for new and continuing student fellowships are also made to

the Admissions/Fellowship Committee by faculty. The Admissions/Fellowship Committee forwards its recommendation to the GGEC, which makes the final decisions.

Further details on the formation, administration, roles, and responsibilities of the Admissions/Fellowships Committee can be found in the Public Health Graduate Group Bylaws (Article V, section 3).

## **2. Doctoral Degree Requirements**

### **2.1 Admissions Process**

The application fee is set and managed by Graduate Division. Application fee waivers may be available for some PhD program applicants. Students who are participants in the McNair Scholars program and other similar programs (see the full list at [https://graduatedivision.ucmerced.edu/sites/graduatedivision.ucmerced.edu/files/page/documents/eligible\\_programs\\_fee waiver\\_0.pdf](https://graduatedivision.ucmerced.edu/sites/graduatedivision.ucmerced.edu/files/page/documents/eligible_programs_fee waiver_0.pdf)) are granted fee waivers automatically by Graduate Division. The Public Health Graduate Group has discretion to award application fee waivers to additional applicants, depending on budget availability. Requests for fee waivers should be submitted by prospective students to the Graduate Chair by January 15<sup>th</sup>, who then discusses them and reaches an agreement with the Executive Committee if funds are not available to grant all waiver requests.

All Public Health PhD program applications will be due online to the Graduate Division by the posted deadline on the Graduate Division website. Late applications will not be accepted. The Admissions Committee Chair will notify all faculty members who have been identified as potential advisors for applicants. These faculty members will review individual applicants and provide a recommendation for admissions (admit, deny, waitlist, or abstain) based on their evaluation of the candidate's qualifications and appropriate fit with the program. Faculty members who are recommending to admit or waitlist a student with a GPA < 3.0 should provide a brief description explaining why the Graduate Division's minimum GPA should be waived.

The Admissions Committee Chair will review any applicants who did not select a public health faculty member (e.g., selected faculty outside of the department) and make recommendations for individual faculty review which are aligned with an applicant's research interests. The Admissions Committee will review applicants' materials who are recommended for admission by the faculty. Other applicants will be moved to the recommended "deny" list and their materials will not be further reviewed. At least two Admissions Committee members will review each candidate's application materials and provide a recommendation for admissions (admit, deny, waitlist) with notes. The Admissions Committee will meet to discuss the merits of each application and achieve consensus regarding an Admissions Committee Recommendation for the faculty. The Admissions Committee Chair will provide the Admissions Committee Recommendations to the Graduate Chair and Public Health Faculty for discussion. The Public Health Graduate Group will vote to finalize the program's recommendations for admissions (admit, deny, or waitlist) for each applicant. Reasons for denials should be documented (i.e., mismatch with program, low test scores relative to a standard baseline, preparation below program standards, incomplete file).

**Internal Fellowship Nominations:** Once the list has been finalized for admissions, the Admissions Committee will develop a list of fellowship recommendations based on applicants' scholarly and research accomplishments, statements/letters of recommendation, contributions to diversity, as well as specific fellowship criteria. The Graduate Group Chair will submit the final admissions recommendations and fellowship nominations to the Graduate Division.

**Waitlist:** The waitlist procedures are as follows:

1. The Graduate Group Chair will compile a list of admitted applicants who submitted their Statement of Intent to Register (SIR) and determine the number of openings available for an appropriate cohort size based on available financial support (e.g., available TA assignments, GSR funding).
2. The Graduate Group Chair will inform the Public Health Graduate Group of new student openings that become available.

3. The Public Health Graduate Group will vote to finalize the program's recommendations for admissions after discussing waitlisted applicants considering the merit of their application and advisor's workload.

## **2.2 Admission Requirements**

Applicants must meet the minimum requirements for admission to graduate study at University of California, Merced. Campus policy regarding admissions to graduate study can be found in the Graduate Policies & Procedures handbook (<https://graduatedivision.ucmerced.edu/current-students/policies-procedures>).

The basic requirements for admissions are adequate preparations for successful graduate study, and academic objectives that can be reasonably satisfied within the specific programs. The Graduate Group and the Graduate Division evaluate applications for admission through assessment of official transcripts of previous academic work (to ensure the candidate has a minimum undergraduate GPA of 3.0 at an institution with degree standards equivalent to those of the University of California), three letters of recommendation, and the applicant's Statement of Purpose. Applicants must also have taken and received at least a B grade in an introductory statistics course. In addition to these minimum requirements, the Graduate Group Admissions Committee may also consider the applicant's:

- (1) academic preparation for the graduate curriculum;
- (2) analytical ability and learning mindset;
- (3) motivation and maturity (because of their strong relationship to performance); and
- (4) specific areas of academic interest.

Furthermore, preference will be given to applicants who have relevant work experience or prior graduate work in their primary area of study. An applicant might be denied admission because of a lack of strength in any of the first four areas, or because the program does not match the applicant's interests in terms of focus and/or academic resources.

### **2.2.1 Coursework Deficiencies**

Courses taken toward a graduate degree at another institution cannot be transferred for credit toward a Ph.D. at UC Merced. However, a course requirement may be waived if a similar course was taken at another institution. This course waiver process is outlined by the Graduate Division and can be found here: <https://graduatedivision.ucmerced.edu/current-students/policies-procedures>

## **2.3 Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs)**

### **2.3.1 Ph.D. Program Learning Outcomes**

1. Breadth – Demonstrate knowledge of the discipline of Public Health. Students will be able to demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of Public Health, including phenomena at the biological, psychological, and social levels
2. Depth – Expertise in a specific scientific domain. Students will be able to apply their expertise in a specific subfield of Public Health and identify novel research questions within the context of current research.
3. Methods – Competency with multiple methodological approaches to conducting rigorous research on public health phenomena. Students will be able to design a study drawing upon both quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches and complete a study using a methodology appropriate to their research area.
4. Communication – Effective scientific communication skills, especially the ability to convey complex concepts and information in a clear and concise manner. Students will be able to communicate their knowledge of contemporary public health methods to diverse audiences.

5. Team Science (transdisciplinary research) – Understanding of team science roles and transdisciplinary approaches to addressing public health challenges. Students will use transdisciplinary approaches to address a pertinent public health challenge.
6. Independent research – The ability to initiate and conduct independent research that makes an original contribution to Public Health knowledge. Students will produce a variety of research of a quality that can be published in a peer-reviewed outlet.
7. Professionalism – Proficiency in the skills needed to participate in the intellectual and organizational aspects of the profession of Public Health. Students will become active members of the professional public health community, including attending and participating in conferences and other appropriate venues.

2.3.2 *MSPH Program Learning Outcomes (for optional MSPH degree). The MSPH is not intended as a stand-alone degree, but rather as an option for students admitted to the Ph.D. program. The enclosed version of P&Ps is in effect for students matriculating in the program in Fall 2023. Students who matriculated prior are bound by the Policies and Procedures in effect upon their matriculation, unless they elect to switch to these new degree requirements.*

1. Breadth – Demonstrate knowledge of the discipline of Public Health. Students will be able to demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of Public Health, including phenomena at the biological, psychological, and social levels.
2. Depth – Mastery of a specific scientific domain. Students will be able to apply their knowledge in a specific subfield of Public Health to contribute to addressing a novel research question.
3. Methods – Competency with qualitative and quantitative methodological approaches to conducting rigorous research on public health phenomena. Students will be able to understand qualitative and quantitative approaches and complete a study using a methodology appropriate to their research area.
4. Communication – Effective scientific communication skills, especially the ability to convey complex concepts and information in a clear and concise manner. Students will be able to communicate their knowledge of contemporary social science methods through preparation of a peer-reviewable journal article.
5. Team Science (transdisciplinary research) – Understanding of team science roles and transdisciplinary approaches to addressing public health challenges. Students will understand the use of transdisciplinary approaches to address a pertinent public health challenge.
6. Professionalism – Proficiency in the skills needed to participate in the intellectual and organizational aspects of the profession of Public Health. Students will become active members in the professional public health community, including attending and participating in conferences and other appropriate venues.

## **2.4 Structure of the Program**

Doctoral study in Public Health is focused on acquiring the conceptual and methodological skills necessary to operate as an independent researcher. In the UC Merced PhD program in Public Health, this is accomplished through a mentorship model in which students work closely with a supervising Faculty Advisor who has primary responsibility for overseeing that student's training. At the same time, students may broaden their research training through involvement in research programs conducted by other faculty. There are also numerous specific requirements. For example, students must complete a program of coursework, a Candidacy (Qualifying) Exam demonstrating professional skills in the discipline, and an empirical Doctoral Dissertation involving original

research that contributes to knowledge in the field. These are only the major requirements and are not meant to be exhaustive. It is also expected that graduate students will contribute to and generate additional research, adding to the intellectual and organizational life of the department.

The Public Health doctoral program is designed for students intending to pursue a Ph.D. in Public Health. PhD students have the option to obtain a *Master of Science in Public Health* degree, either en route to a PhD degree or in lieu of a PhD degree if a student exits the graduate program prior to fulfilling the PhD requirements. More details are provided in section 2.7.

## **2.5 Components**

### **2.5.1 Coursework**

A minimum of 14 4-unit courses (56 units) of graduate (200 series) coursework are required for the PhD. PhD students are also required to have at least four semesters of full-time (defined as being enrolled in a minimum of 12 units) academic residence at UC Merced. More details are provided in section 2.6.

### **2.5.2 Optional second-year paper/MSPH degree**

By the end of the second year of study, PhD students who wish to obtain the optional MSPH degree are expected to complete a second-year research paper, which consists of an empirical research project (i.e., comprising primary, secondary, or meta-analysis of data) taken from the conceptualization stage, through design, data collection, analysis, and write-up, and in the form of an empirical journal article. More details are provided in section 2.7.

### **2.5.3 Qualifying Exam**

In order to demonstrate readiness to proceed to the dissertation phase, students must pass the Qualifying Examination by the end of the Spring semester of the student's third year. Qualifying Examinations are intended to determine whether the student possesses the knowledge and skills needed to successfully complete a dissertation research project in their chosen areas of interest. The Qualifying Exam in Public Health consists of a two-part comprehensive written exam, administered once per year in December, with a make-up exam available the following May of each year. More details are provided in section 2.8.

### **2.5.4 Dissertation**

The dissertation process starts with the establishment of the Doctoral Committee (DC), which is done when recording Advancement to Candidacy. The Doctoral Candidate submits a dissertation proposal to the DC, and defends the proposal at an oral Proposal Defense meeting. If the proposal is passed by unanimous consensus of the DC, the student undertakes and completes the proposed research. Having completed the research, the student must submit a final written Dissertation to the DC, and defend the Dissertation at an oral Dissertation Defense meeting, which constitutes the Final Examination for the Ph.D. More details are provided in section 2.9.

### **2.5.5 Special Requirements**

The Public Health PhD program requires all graduate students pursuing the Ph.D. to acquire teaching experience at the post-secondary level under faculty supervision, for no less than two semesters. This requirement is usually satisfied by appointment as a Teaching Assistant or Teaching Fellow in undergraduate courses. More details are provided in section 2.10.

## **2.6 Course Requirements**

A total of 56 units of coursework are required for the PhD.

### **2.6.1 Core Courses (total 24 units)**

Typically, 24 of the 56 required units will come from six required core courses, shown in the table below.



Course Number	Course Name	Units
PH 201	Foundations in PH	4
PH 202	Epidemiology	4
PH 211 (Stats I) and PH 212 (Stats II)	PH Stats I and II	8
PH 203	Research Methods	4
PH 208a & 208b (counted as 1 course taught over 2 semesters)	Professional seminar	4

Students must receive a passing grade (a B or higher) in all core courses. Students receiving a failing grade in these courses must repeat the course and receive a passing grade. Students may, in collaboration with their Faculty Advisor, determine the pace of coursework that is appropriate. However, the core requirements must be met in the first year of residence at UC Merced unless a required course is not offered during the first year. At least ten 4-unit courses (or 40 units), including all core required courses, must be completed before advancing to candidacy.

To ensure consistency in training, the following core courses cannot be waived:

- Foundations of Public Health (PH 201)
- Epidemiology (PH 202)
- Research methods (PH 203)
- Professionalization Seminar (PH 208a & 208b)

Students may petition the Graduate Group's Education and Curriculum Committee to substitute a different statistics class or classes. Such a class or classes must cover some part of linear models and must be approved by the instructor of record of the statistics class(es) to be substituted.

#### 2.6.2 *Advanced Methods and Substantive Courses*

The remaining 32 (of 56) units will come from a combination of Advanced Methods courses and substantive/elective courses.

- Advanced Methods: One advanced methods course (4 units; choose from PH213 Advanced Biostatistics, PH215 Qualitative Methods, or PH2XX Evaluation). Students may petition to take their advanced methods requirement in a department outside of Public Health.
- Substantive/elective courses: Seven courses (28 units). Relevant Public Health courses that fall under this category include but are not limited to: PH204 Environmental Health, PH205 Health Services Research and Policy, PH216 Health Policy, PH206 Health Communication, PH207 Health Behavior Theory, PH220 Environmental Epi, PH209A/B Grant Writing, and PH290 (revolving topics). As the department grows, new course options will be introduced.
  - Additional Advanced Methods courses taken (beyond the one required) will count towards this requirement.
  - Up to four of the seven required substantive courses may be taken in departments outside Public Health, although the department's preference is that students take as many substantive courses as possible within Public Health. Credit will not be given for more than 4 courses taken outside of the Public Health department.
  - Credit will be given for up to 2 "conjoined" elective courses (i.e., courses that allow both undergraduate and graduate enrollment, and that have different subject prefixes, titles, and/or course numbers but meet together with the same instructor(s) as one class), assuming that the student has enrolled in the graduate-level course number/version of the class.

- Directed reading courses (i.e., PH294 units) may count for up to 8 substantive course units if the following conditions are met:
  1. The coursework is facilitated by a Public Health faculty member (core or affiliate),
  2. A complete syllabus is prepared for the course, for submission to the Graduate Group's Education and Curriculum Committee for approval before the last day of the Add/Drop period of the semester in which the course will be taken, and
  3. There is no equivalent formally approved course anticipated to be offered at UC Merced within the student's first 3 years of study.
  4. To sign up for independent study credit, students should use the Independent Study form, available at:  
[https://registrar.ucmerced.edu/sites/registrar.ucmerced.edu/files/page/documents/independent\\_study\\_ay.pdf](https://registrar.ucmerced.edu/sites/registrar.ucmerced.edu/files/page/documents/independent_study_ay.pdf). The "Graduate" option should be selected on the form, and PH294 can be indicated on the "other" line under "Specify one course number from the following." Instructor permission can be obtained by attaching an approval email to the submission, which should be emailed to [registrar@ucmerced.edu](mailto:registrar@ucmerced.edu), copying the PH Graduate Specialist and [ssha.grad@ucmerced.edu](mailto:ssha.grad@ucmerced.edu).
- PH295 research units may not count towards the 56 required units. It is expected that students will conduct research separate from their coursework as part of their doctoral training.

### 2.6.3 *Summary*

24 units of core coursework and 32 units of additional coursework (comprising advanced methods coursework and substantive courses) are required for a total of 56 units. Full-time students must enroll for 12 units per semester including research, academic and seminar units. Per UC regulations, ordinarily students shall not receive credits for more than 12 units of graduate level courses per semester.

## 2.7 **Optional Second-Year Paper/MSPH degree**

Each student must declare to their Faculty Advisory Committee, at their first end-of-year progress meeting, whether they plan to complete the second-year paper and obtain the optional MSPH degree. The following procedures thus apply *only* to students wishing to obtain the optional MSPH degree.

The student does not necessarily need not be the originator of the second-year paper research idea, but must be an active participant in all steps, and the write-up must be sole authored by the student; other authors may be added to a later published version of the paper, as appropriate, and the order of authorship on such a subsequent publication may change. The project should typically be completed by the end of the second year of study (typically the end of the Spring semester); it must be completed and submitted for review by the Faculty Advisory Committee prior to commencement of the 3rd year of the program (i.e., by the end of the summer following the 2nd year of graduate study), and prior to advancing to candidacy. If a full draft is not submitted by this time, the student will be required to convene a Faculty Advisory Committee meeting at the end of the fall semester of their third year and will receive an Unsatisfactory Progress or Potentially Unsatisfactory Progress evaluation.

The second-year paper will be conducted in close collaboration with the Faculty Advisor; students should ensure that the Advisor concurs with decisions made at all stages of the project. The second-year paper will be evaluated by the members of the Faculty Advisory Committee (FAC). Upon submission of the final paper, the FAC have at least 14 but no more than 28 days to evaluate the paper and make a recommendation as to whether the second-year paper requirement has been satisfied. The recommendation will be for the student to be awarded an MSPH and continue onto the pre-candidacy phase (Pass — meeting all evaluation rubric criteria at the "Intermediate" level or above), or to not be awarded an MSPH (Fail — failing to meet all evaluation rubric criteria at the "Intermediate" level or above). In the event that the second-year paper is awarded a Fail, the student will be given the opportunity to revise the paper. A written request for revisions will be provided to the student. Students will

be expected to undertake the requested revisions and resubmit the paper to the FAC within 6 weeks. The FAC will then re-evaluate the paper, and provide a revised assessment. The FAC, by unanimous consensus, determines the result of the student examination. In the event that the student and the FAC do not agree on the acceptability of the second-year paper, the Chair of the Public Health Graduate Group will make the final decision. If the student fails the second-year paper again after revising, they will receive an Unsatisfactory evaluation and may be subject to removal from the Ph.D. program.

## **2.8 Qualifying Examination and Candidacy Requirements**

Graduate students are considered resident graduates, not candidates for a degree, unless admitted to candidacy by the Graduate Division after formal application and satisfactory completion of candidacy requirements. Candidacy requirements comprise:

- Demonstrating a high level of scholarship in full-time study (a minimum of 12 units per semester including research hours) at the PhD level, for at least 4 semesters,
- Completing at least ten 4-unit courses (or 40 units), including:
  - All core required courses (24 units),
  - At least four elective courses (or 16 units),
- A minimum cumulative grade point average of 3.0,
- Passing the Qualifying Exam, which demonstrates readiness to proceed to the dissertation phase.

Students must take the Qualifying Exam, to be administered by the Graduate Group in December of each year, during their 3<sup>rd</sup> year of graduate study. Students who cannot take the exam in their 3<sup>rd</sup> year due to illness, educational leave, etc., must petition the Graduate Group Chair for permission to postpone the exam. The student must submit this petition via email at least 6 weeks before the scheduled December exam. Only one petition is allowed, and the student may only request a postponement of one semester (i.e., they must take the exam the following May, when the make-up exam is offered for students who received a Fail grade on their December attempt).

Students should submit the Graduate Division's *Application for Qualifying Examination* form (available at <https://graduatedivision.ucmerced.edu/faculty-staff-resources/forms-publications>), with all committee members' signatures, at least one month prior to the completion of the Qualifying Exam. Signatures should be obtained from the rotating QE committee, whose membership is determined by the department the previous spring (see pg. 13). In the event that the student does not pass their qualifying examinations in the December of his or her third year, he/she may retake them one time at the end of the following spring semester.

Qualifying Examinations are intended to determine whether the student possesses the knowledge and skills needed to successfully complete a dissertation research project in their chosen areas of interest. The Comprehensive Qualifying Exam (QE) is required for all Ph.D. students in Public Health and will be administered in December of each year, on specific dates set by the Graduate Group. Students have the option of taking this two-part qualifying exam either in their 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> year in the program, according to the following policies: Students admitted to the program with an MPH or equivalent Master's degree would be eligible to take the Qualifying Exam in their 2<sup>nd</sup> year; such students should choose their QE timing (year 2 vs. year 3) in consultation with their Faculty Advisory Committee and this decision is subject to approval by the Graduate Group Chair. Students who were admitted to the program without a Master's degree would be required to take it in their 3<sup>rd</sup> year. Students who do not pass one or both parts of the exam on their first attempt must re-take it the following May, on dates set by the Graduate Group.

The exam will consist of 2 parts, each of which will be given on a different day (e.g., a Tuesday and Thursday of 1 week). Students will be required to sign an honor statement asserting that their exam reflects solely their own work; students may not work together on the exam, nor may they use generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT) to create any content for their exam responses. Per [UC Merced's academic honesty policy](#) and Graduate Council

guidelines, generative AI is considered a form of plagiarism unless cited explicitly. However, students may use AI grammar-checking tools such as Microsoft Word Editor or Grammarly to proofread and refine their grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Students will be allowed to consult the Internet during the exam if they wish to do any background reading. Each part of the exam will be designed to be answerable within 6 hours, but students will have 8 hours to complete each part. To avoid time conflicts with courses, the qualifying exam will be given in the week after fall semester classes end. If a student cannot or does not wish to take the exam at home, a private space on campus will be made available to them (with computer if necessary). The questions on the exam will require demonstration of mastery in core public health content areas:

- Knowledge of rigorous methodological approaches appropriate to designing and carrying out research in public health.
- Knowledge of appropriate measurement techniques, including quantitative and/or qualitative measures, for key constructs in public health.
- Competency in evaluating and interpreting basic epidemiologic and biostatistical analysis techniques.
- Ability to critically review research in public health with respect to the individual, community, and societal determinants of population health.

The exam questions will be aligned with Public Health PhD Program Learning Outcomes 1, 3, 4, and 7, as appropriate at this stage of student training:

1. Breadth – Demonstrate knowledge of the discipline of Public Health. Students will be able to demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of Public Health, including phenomena at the biological, psychological, and social levels.
3. Methods – Competency with multiple methodological approaches to conducting rigorous research on public health phenomena. Students will be able to design a study drawing upon both quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches and complete a study using a methodology appropriate to their research area.
4. Communication – Effective scientific communication skills, especially the ability to convey complex concepts and information in a clear and concise manner. Students will be able to communicate their knowledge of contemporary public health methods to diverse audiences.
7. Professionalism – Proficiency in the skills needed to participate in the intellectual and organizational aspects of the profession of Public Health. Students will become active members of the professional public health community, including attending and participating in conferences and other appropriate venues.

### **Format of the exam**

*Part 1.* Produce a small-scale research proposal (based on a prompt provided by the Graduate Group) that includes generating:

- a. A specific research question designed to be answered by the proposed study.
- b. A study design to answer the research question proposed by the student, wherein any research design is welcome if a strong rationale is provided. Options for the research design include:
  - Quantitative (e.g., cross-sectional, cohort, case-control, ecological, time-series, randomized trial, intervention/evaluation study etc.); or
  - Qualitative (e.g., ethnographic study, case study, grounded theory, action research, etc.).
  -

- c. Details about the methods of conducting the evaluation, including information about the study sample, data sources or methods of data collection, and analysis plan;
- d. Consideration of the potential limitations of the study design and methods, and how the proposed approach addresses potential threats to validity; and
- e. Consideration of the human subjects/bioethical concerns relevant to the conduct of the study.

Students will *not* be required to address the background or rationale for conducting the proposed study, details on the research team, knowledge translation activities, budget, or timeline. The proposal should be 5-7 pages in length, 1.5-spaced, using 0.75" margins and 12-point Times New Roman font.

*Part 2.* Produce a critical analysis of a recent publication in a public health journal. Faculty will select 3 recent quantitative publications from different areas within public health, and students will be allowed to choose one of these three on which to conduct their critical analysis. The analysis should include:

- a. Describing the research question(s) the authors are asking;
- b. Very briefly summarizing the authors' arguments for why the study is important, including a discussion of their key hypotheses;
- c. Critically analyzing the authors' research design and the strengths and limitations of their study data;
- d. Synthesizing and interpreting the quantitative results presented in the article (synthesis and interpretation emphasized here – as opposed to, for example, simply identifying and repeating reported coefficients);
- e. Considering the effects of any potential biases, confounding, and statistical power on the results; and
- f. Discussing causality, particularly with respect to how the study may or may not inform causal interpretations of the association(s) of interest, and how the study results could or should be used for public health applications.

Part 2 is expected to be approximately 3-5 double-spaced pages in length, using 0.75" margins and 12-point Times New Roman font.

The comprehensive exam will be graded on a Pass/Fail basis by a rotating committee of 3 faculty members, whose membership is determined through random selection the previous May. Each member of the committee will read every exam (parts 1 and 2, separately) and provide a grade for each part. Grading will be double-blinded, through the assistance of the graduate assistant. Each part of the comprehensive exam will be scored as Pass or Fail by each faculty committee member. In the event of disagreement among any 2 committee members about an exam's grade, the entire committee will discuss the exam and come to a consensus. If a student fails one or both parts of the exam, the committee will provide anonymous feedback about which aspects of the exam contributed to the failing grade.

Students who do not pass one or both parts of the exam on their first attempt must re-take it the following May, on dates set by the Graduate Group. If a student passes one part but fails the other part, they need only retake the part that they failed. The exam questions will differ between the December and May versions. Failure to pass one or both parts of the first Comprehensive Exam will trigger a mid-year (January) evaluation meeting with the student's entire Faculty Advisory Committee. Failing one part will result in a Potentially Unsatisfactory evaluation at this meeting. Failing both parts will result in an Unsatisfactory evaluation at this meeting. Failure to pass the Comprehensive Exam on the second attempt will result in an Unsatisfactory Progress evaluation and expulsion from the PhD program.

When the Qualifying Exam is passed by unanimous consensus of the examination committee, the student is recommended for Advancement to Candidacy as reported to the Graduate Division on the *Qualifying Examination Report* (<https://graduatedivision.ucmerced.edu/faculty-staff-resources/forms-publications>). This form must be signed by all FAC members. This form is also submitted if the student failed the examination. If the recommendation of the FAC is favorable, the student must file the appropriate paperwork (*Advance to Candidacy*

for the Degree of Doctor Philosophy Form and Conflict of Interest Form) with the Graduate Division and pay the candidacy fee in order to be officially promoted to Ph.D. Candidacy.

## **2.9 Dissertation Requirements**

The Doctoral Dissertation is the culmination of the PhD program, in which the Doctoral Candidate demonstrates the capability to conduct research independently that makes an original contribution to knowledge of a quality that can be published in a reputable scientific journal. The planning and completion of the Dissertation is supervised by the Doctoral Committee Chair, who usually is the Candidate's Faculty Advisor. The student's FAC (Doctoral stage) approves the Dissertation proposal and evaluates whether the Dissertation has been completed in accordance with high scientific standards.

In overview, the dissertation process starts with the establishment of the Doctoral-stage FAC, which is done when recording Advancement to Candidacy. The Doctoral Candidate submits a dissertation proposal to the Doctoral-stage FAC and defends the proposal at an oral Proposal Defense meeting. This should usually be done within six months of Advancing to Candidacy. If the proposal is passed by the FAC, the student undertakes and completes the proposed research. Having completed the research, the student must submit a final written Dissertation to the FAC, and defend the Dissertation at an oral defense meeting. This Dissertation Defense constitutes the Final Examination for the PhD; at the conclusion of the Defense, the Committee votes on whether to approve the Dissertation. These stages are presented in more detail below.

### **2.9.1 Dissertation Proposal**

The Dissertation Proposal serves three primary functions. First, it reviews the relevant literature and in so doing defines the area of inquiry of the proposed Dissertation. Second, it provides a clear statement of actionable research aims, questions, and/or hypotheses that will be addressed in the Dissertation. Third, it outlines the methodological and analytic approach that will enable the proposed research to address these aims, questions, and/or hypotheses. The Dissertation Proposal should be approximately 30 double-spaced pages, not including references and appendices. Students may not use generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT) to create any content for their dissertation proposal; however, students may use AI grammar-checking tools such as Microsoft Word Editor or Grammarly to proofread and refine their grammar, spelling, and punctuation. The Candidate works with the Faculty Advisor until the latter deems the Dissertation Proposal of enough quality to pass to the Doctoral-stage FAC. Committee members should make every effort to provide such feedback in a timely fashion but should inform the student promptly if they will be unable to provide such informal feedback. When the finalized Dissertation Proposal is submitted, the FAC should have at least 7 but no more than 14 days in which to review it prior to the Proposal Defense Meeting.

Proposal Defense Meeting: The Candidate must consult with the FAC to schedule the Proposal Defense Meeting, at which all members of the committee must be present in person (or via conference call under extenuating circumstances such as a Committee member being on sabbatical or off-site). The Candidate should schedule a minimum 2-hour block of time for the meeting. At the Proposal Defense Meeting, the Candidate will present an overview of the proposed research. The Committee will then discuss the proposed research with the Candidate. At the conclusion of the Proposal Defense Meeting, the Candidate will be asked to leave, and the FAC will deliberate on whether to pass the proposal. The Committee recommendation is by unanimous consensus, leading to one of the following recommendations:

- *Pass:* The proposal is passed, and the Candidate may commence with the proposed research.
- *Minor Revisions:* The proposal is passed pending minor revisions, which upon completion must be approved by the Faculty Advisor and any Committee member wishing to review such changes.
- *Major Revisions:* The proposal is not passed because major substantive or methodological issues need to be addressed. The Candidate must revise the proposal considering committee feedback and resubmit the proposal within three months. At that time, the Candidate must reschedule the Proposal Defense Meeting and complete it satisfactorily before undertaking any dissertation research. Failure to complete it

satisfactorily at a second defense must be addressed in the student's next Review, which must then involve the student's entire FAC and will potentially result in an Unsatisfactory Progress evaluation.

### *2.9.2 Dissertation*

Following successful defense of the Dissertation Proposal, the Doctoral Candidate undertakes and completes the proposed research under the supervision of the Doctoral-stage FAC. Although there are no set criteria for dissertation length or content, students are expected to produce a body of work that contains a thorough review of the literature, theoretical innovations, novel data collection and/or analysis, and at least three substantive chapters. Students may not use generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT) to create any content for their dissertation. However, students may use AI grammar-checking tools such as Microsoft Word Editor or Grammarly to proofread and refine their grammar, spelling, and punctuation. One of two dissertation formats is typically used: Dissertations should be convertible to (a) one book or (b) three related but separable articles. The format of the Dissertation manuscript should be approved by all members of the FAC, subject to any requirements by the Public Health Graduate Group, the Graduate Division, and the University Archives. Candidates prepare the manuscript under the supervision of the Faculty Advisor who requests revisions until s/he judges that the work is ready to be reviewed by the remaining Committee members. For additional details regarding expectations, see the [UC Merced Thesis and Dissertation Guidelines](#).

Once the dissertation document is complete in the opinion of the student and his or her Faculty Advisor, the Candidate circulates the Dissertation among FAC members, allowing for a reasonable time frame for the Committee members to read and review. The FAC should provide comments, possibly leading to another revision before the final submission and the scheduling of the Dissertation Defense. FAC members should provide these comments in a timely fashion. The complete Dissertation must be provided to the FAC members at least 14 days prior to the scheduled defense.

### *2.9.3 Final Examination (Defense)*

Once all members of the FAC have read the dissertation and agreed that it is ready to be defended, the student is expected to negotiate with the members of the FAC and schedule a date and time for the defense. Announcement of the oral defense time and location will be made in appropriate forums such as an email list serve or a Public Health bulletin board. All members of the FAC must attend the thesis defense in person (or via conference call or videoconference under extenuating circumstances, such as a FAC member being at a distant site).

The defense of the Dissertation is a capstone event in the student's graduate career. It consists of an oral presentation of the Dissertation research by the candidate, followed by questions. This portion of the defense is open to the public. The Candidate is tasked with responding to the questions clearly and coherently. At the conclusion of the public portion of the defense, the Candidate and FAC will dismiss the public in order to discuss the dissertation in private. At the conclusion of the committee questions, the Candidate is excused, and the FAC deliberates on the quality of the written dissertation and the student's performance during the defense. The committee makes one of the following recommendations by unanimous consensus:

- *Pass*: The dissertation and defense are of enough quality to warrant the awarding of a PhD degree from the University of California. The committee recommendation for passage must be unanimous.
- *Minor Revisions*: The Dissertation is passed pending minor revisions, which upon completion must be approved by the Faculty Advisor and any FAC member wishing to review such changes. Upon approval the Candidate is awarded the PhD.
- *Major Revisions*: The Dissertation is not passed because major substantive or methodological issues need to be addressed. The Candidate must revise the Dissertation considering FAC feedback and resubmit the Dissertation within 6 weeks. At that time, the Candidate must reschedule the Defense Meeting and complete it satisfactorily to receive a recommendation of Pass.

If the Doctoral-stage FAC recommends awarding the PhD degree, Committee members must sign the *Final Report for the PhD Degree* (available at <https://graduatedivision.ucmerced.edu/faculty-staff-resources/forms->



publications), the conferral of the PhD, subject to final submission of the approved Dissertation for deposit in the University Archives (see *Graduate Policies & Procedures Handbook*, Sect. VII.B.8, available at <https://graduatedivision.ucmerced.edu/current-students/policies-procedures>).

## **2.10 Special Requirements**

### *2.10.1 Optional MSPH degree along the way*

The Public Health Graduate Program is designed for students interested in pursuing a PhD in Public Health. PhD students have the option to obtain a *Master of Science in Public Health* (MSPH) degree, either en route to a PhD degree or in lieu of a PhD degree if a student exits the graduate program prior to fulfilling the PhD requirements. The advancement-to-candidacy course requirements satisfy the course requirements for the optional MSPH degree. The second year paper at the Pass level will serve as the Master's capstone project (Plan II).

Requirements to receive the optional MSPH:

- Complete at least four semesters of academic residency at UCM
- Complete the core courses: PH201, PH202, PH 203, PH 208a, PH 208b, PH 211 and PH212
- Complete 4 elective courses (16 units of coursework), which can but are not required to include an Advanced Methods course
- Have a cumulative GPA no lower than 3.0
- Receive a "pass" on the second year paper

Students who choose the optional MSPH degree en route to their Ph.D. (non-terminal) need to complete the Graduate Division form *Final Report for Master's Degree* following the successful completion of the Spring semester of their 2<sup>nd</sup> year of study. All other MSPH requirements will have been met at this point and the MSPH degree will be awarded at the end of the Spring semester, provided they meet the above criteria. Note that many students completing the second-year paper do not receive final advisory committee approval until August of their second year, and may therefore need to file for the MSPH degree in the fall of their 3<sup>rd</sup> year. Links to the form and detailed instructions on how to submit it can be found in the Public Health Graduate Student Handbook.

Students who opt for a terminal MSPH degree in lieu of the PhD degree should inform their Faculty Advisor and the Graduate Group Chair of this decision prior to the start of their terminal semester. Students must complete the relevant portions of the Graduate Division form "Application for Advancement to Candidacy" at this time.

### *2.10.2 Teaching Requirement*

The Public Health PhD program requires all graduate students pursuing the Ph.D. to acquire teaching experience at the post-secondary level under faculty supervision, for *no less than two semesters*. This requirement is usually satisfied by appointment as a Teaching Assistant or Teaching Fellow in undergraduate courses. For more information, consult the Academic Appointment and Graduate Student Employment section in the Graduate Policies and Procedures Handbook.

Additional policies:

- Students who have advanced to candidacy may also satisfy two semesters of serving as a TA by teaching one full course of their own design (see below). It is expected that many students will, in fact, exceed these minimums and thus accrue even more teaching experience. A student may request a waiver of the TA requirement, partially or completely, by petitioning their FAC that they have completed an alternative equivalent teaching experience (e.g., TA at a prior institution, community college instructor).
- After advancing to candidacy (i.e., passing the Candidacy Exam), a student may serve as Teaching Associate (the Instructor of Record) for pay. Having advanced to candidacy however does not guarantee an assignment as a Teaching Associate or Fellow as this depends on the availability of courses to teach.



Moreover, to be prepared to serve as a Teaching Associate or Fellow and teach a full course in Public Health, the student *must* complete and pass the Teaching Preparation option of the Candidacy Exam.

- The Graduate Division has several rules that affect when a graduate student may serve as a Teaching Associate or a Teaching Fellow. The graduate student will typically be a Teaching Associate or Fellow for a lower division course. However, on an exception basis, a graduate student, upon recommendation from an academic unit, may be assigned an upper-division course or course section with the written approval of the Graduate Dean and the UCM Academic Senate's Graduate and Undergraduate Councils. Such approval must be obtained in writing prior to the student beginning their assignment/appointment. A graduate student will also typically be a Teaching Associate or Fellow for a summer course so as not to unduly interfere with their academic year studies. Again, however, exceptions may be granted. Finally, Graduate Division rules limit graduate students to a maximum of 14 semesters as a Teaching Assistant or Teaching Associate. Summer appointments are excluded from these limits.

## **2.11 Advising Structure and Mentoring**

### *2.11.1 Advising Structure*

A graduate student is expected to have a faculty advisor at all times during their graduate studies. The graduate chair is the default academic advisor for all incoming doctoral students. It is the responsibility of the student to secure a Faculty Advisor by the end of the spring semester of the first year. The Faculty Advisor must be a member of the Public Health Graduate Group. The student's selection is approved by the Public Health Graduate Group Chair. The student and the Faculty Advisor will regularly interact and together develop research projects that will lead to a focus to be pursued in the student's Doctoral Dissertation. The Faculty Advisor, in the role of a mentor, plans strategies that will support the development of required competencies and provides ongoing informal feedback regarding the student's progress. In addition, the Faculty Advisor conducts a formal evaluation of the student's progress in the program at least annually (see Section 2.11.2). Therefore, each graduate student must always have a recognized Faculty Advisor who agrees to take on this important role. If a student and their Faculty Advisor part ways for any reason, the student has one semester to identify a new Faculty Advisor; if after one semester they have failed to do so, the Graduate Chair will assume that role on a temporary basis and the student will be in Unsatisfactory standing. The Faculty Advisor is Chair of the student's FAC and oversees the student's progress in the doctoral program.

The Public Health program has adopted the use of an advisor/mentee "compact" that encourages reflection on and discussion of responsibilities and objectives in the advising relationship for both faculty mentor and student, and outlines mutually-agreed-upon expectations. This document represents an agreement reached between the graduate student and the faculty mentor regarding the structure of the working relationship during the student's working relationship with the faculty member. It should be developed collaboratively between the two parties at the start of a new mentoring relationship and should be revised as needed (and is recommended to be reviewed at least once per year). Graduate students are required to submit the completed compact to the Graduate Chair by the end of their first year in the program.

The Public Health program has also adopted the Graduate Council-approved Mentoring Guidelines, which can be found at [https://senate.ucmerced.edu/sites/senate.ucmerced.edu/files/page/documents/ucm\\_mentoring\\_guidelines\\_gc\\_approved\\_9\\_23\\_14.pdf](https://senate.ucmerced.edu/sites/senate.ucmerced.edu/files/page/documents/ucm_mentoring_guidelines_gc_approved_9_23_14.pdf). For additional UC Merced resources on conflict resolution, consult the materials found on the Graduate Division website: [https://graduatedivision.ucmerced.edu/sites/graduatedivision.ucmerced.edu/files/documents/faculty\\_graduate\\_student\\_conflict\\_management\\_final\\_4\\_7\\_22.pdf](https://graduatedivision.ucmerced.edu/sites/graduatedivision.ucmerced.edu/files/documents/faculty_graduate_student_conflict_management_final_4_7_22.pdf)

### *2.11.2 Evaluation of Student Progress*

Annual Review Process: Student progress will be evaluated on an annual basis. To this end, the student prepares a cumulative Progress Report prior to the end of the spring semester. The Progress Report must be reviewed by the student's FAC, which is chaired by the Faculty Advisor. At this meeting, feedback is provided to the student both orally and in writing. Annual Faculty Review continues until the student has completed an approved Doctoral

Dissertation. A fall semester Progress Report and student/FAC meeting (taking place in December or early January) may be convened in any year by request of the student, Faculty Advisor, or other member of the FAC. A fall semester Progress Report and FAC meeting *must* be conducted if the student has previously received an Unsatisfactory or Potentially Unsatisfactory evaluation, or has failed their Qualifying Exam or Dissertation Proposal. If the student opts to complete the second-year paper and receives a Fail grade on the paper, a fall semester Progress Report and FAC meeting must also be conducted.

On or about May 15<sup>th</sup> of each Spring Semester, the Graduate Group faculty will meet to discuss the evaluation of all graduate students.

As part of each student's annual review, a determination must be made whether the student's progress on the whole is More Than Satisfactory, Satisfactory, Potentially Unsatisfactory, or Unsatisfactory. This determination is based on the student's progress toward the Public Health Program Learning Outcomes expected for their degree stage. The determination is then clearly communicated in written form and signed by the faculty member(s) who completed the review. The student also signs the evaluation indicating understanding of the evaluation and is given one copy. The original is placed in the student's file.

- *More Than Satisfactory Progress:* An evaluation of More Than Satisfactory academic progress should be reserved for students whose progress has substantially exceeded expectations appropriate for their stage in the program, as determined from the student's recent academic record and overall performance. Students whose progress is within range of normative expectations should be given a determination of Satisfactory Progress.
- *Satisfactory Progress:* Satisfactory progress is determined based on both the student's recent academic record and overall performance. Satisfactory Progress is more than simply avoiding displaying any of the specific behaviors listed below as indicative of Unsatisfactory Progress. It is a subjective judgment made by the Faculty Advisor and members of the FAC based on the quality, quantity, and timeliness of performance in research, progress toward stage-appropriate development in all PLO areas, as well as the other activities described in the Graduate Student Handbook. The Faculty Advisor is expected to communicate their standards in these respects on a continual basis. These standards also provide the framework for the Annual Reviews.
- *Potentially Unsatisfactory Progress:* Potentially unsatisfactory progress is *in part* determined with reference to the Unsatisfactory Progress criteria. Students deemed at risk of meeting  $\geq 1$  of these criteria may be judged as making potentially unsatisfactory progress. See first paragraph in this section for a description of the consequences of a Potentially Unsatisfactory Progress evaluation.
- *Unsatisfactory Progress:* Unsatisfactory academic progress is *in part* determined based on explicit requirements, including those outlined in the UC Merced Graduate Division's *Graduate Policies & Procedures Handbook* (Sect. VI.A.2.1) and reproduced here:
  - An overall grade point average below 3.0; or
  - A grade point average below 3.0 in two successive semesters; or
  - Fewer than 8 units completed and applicable toward the advanced degree requirements in the last two semesters; or
  - Failure to complete required courses or examinations satisfactorily within the period specified by the Graduate Group; or
  - Failure to pass Candidacy or Dissertation Final Examination in two attempts; or
  - Failure to progress academically within the Normal Time to Degree framework specified for the student's Graduate Group; or
  - The appropriate faculty committee's evaluation of unsatisfactory progress toward completion of the thesis or dissertation.

Note, however, that the professional judgment of the faculty assigned the role to evaluate the student, upon review of all graduate work undertaken by that student, *is paramount*. Faculty may establish more restrictive criteria than the above minimum criteria.

A judgment of Unsatisfactory Progress can have significant negative consequences for a graduate student. A graduate student who has not demonstrated satisfactory academic progress may be subject to academic disqualification if satisfactory progress is not achieved within one semester of receipt of Notification of Unsatisfactory Performance. In addition, students who have not demonstrated satisfactory academic progress are not eligible for any academic appointment/employment and may not receive fellowship support or other awards. Students who have been placed in Unsatisfactory standing may not petition to switch to a new Faculty Advisor.

Communication of Potentially Unsatisfactory Progress: It is important to give students an early warning of potentially unsatisfactory progress. The Annual Review specified above is a minimum. In addition, Faculty Advisors are encouraged to be direct in communicating orally, and in writing as necessary, with students demonstrating difficulties as soon as possible and on a continual basis. For example, course instructors are encouraged to engage in this communication, and to inform the Faculty Advisor when a student is experiencing difficulties during a course, and not wait until the end.

It is useful for the Faculty Advisor to keep a written record of all such communications. When notices of potential unsatisfactory progress are provided in writing to the student, a copy should also be retained in the Public Health Graduate Group files and another copy sent to the Graduate Dean. The written communication should include specific details on areas that require improvement, provide an outline for future expectations of academic progress, and set meeting dates to maintain continuity in advisement. The purpose of the notice of potentially unsatisfactory progress is to provide the student with a reasonable period of time (usually at least one academic semester) in which to make the necessary improvement in their academic status, and successfully complete their graduate study.

In the case of a formal determination of Potentially Unsatisfactory Progress following an Annual Review, criteria must be specified in writing detailing what the student will need to achieve to be removed from this status and the timetable for doing so. This is included in the written feedback provided to the student as part of the formal review. Whenever a student has been deemed to make Potentially Unsatisfactory Progress, the student's whole FAC needs to review progress at the end of the subsequent semester and determine status at that time. The professional judgment of the FAC, upon review of all graduate work undertaken by that student, is paramount in determining whether the student can or cannot be removed from Potentially Unsatisfactory Progress status. If a student in Potentially Unsatisfactory Progress does not return to Satisfactory Progress within one semester, they will then receive a "Notice of Unsatisfactory Progress" from the Graduate Chair and have one additional semester to return to Satisfactory Progress; otherwise, they will be subject to academic disqualification. While it is expected that the Faculty Advisor will communicate with the student when in Potentially Unsatisfactory Progress status to provide guidance and feedback on efforts to meet the specified criteria, it is ultimately the student's responsibility to achieve progress that can be deemed Satisfactory Progress.

#### *2.11.3 Disqualification based on Unsatisfactory Progress*

The process for disqualifying a student based on a determination of Unsatisfactory Progress is described in the Graduate Division Policies & Procedures handbook, which can be found at <https://graduatedivision.ucmerced.edu/current-students/policies-procedures>.

#### *2.11.4 Student Appeals Procedures*

Per the Regulations of the Academic Senate Merced Division, a student who is subject to an impending academic disqualification has 30 calendar days (from the date of the Graduate Dean's Notification of Impending Academic Disqualification) to respond in writing to the recommendation for disqualification. Student appeals will be considered only if based upon appropriate cause, such as: (1) procedural error; (2) judgments based on non-academic criteria; (3) apparent personal bias; (4) specific mitigating circumstances affecting academic performance; or (5) discrimination on the basis of race, religion, sex or other protected status. More details on the appeals process are provided in the Graduate Division Policies & Procedures Handbook.

## **2.12 Doctoral Degree Committees**

#### 2.12.1 *Faculty Advisory Committee (FAC)*

Mentoring and/or guidance of a student are provided by a Faculty Advisory Committee (FAC). This Committee is established jointly by the Faculty Advisor and student, before or during the fall semester of the 2nd year in the program. The student and members of this Committee should meet once per year, at a minimum, to provide the appropriate mentoring and/or guidance. This Committee is also charged with formally evaluating the student's progress in the Graduate Group at least annually, following the completion of each spring semester. The FAC must include at least 3 faculty members: It is expected that at least one member of the FAC will be tenured, either at the level of Associate or Full Professor. At least 2 of the committee members must be Public Health Graduate Group core faculty. Members of the FAC may be replaced by agreement among the student and Faculty Advisor. It is the responsibility of the student to notify the committee member being replaced (see section 2.12.5). The FAC oversees the optional second-year paper, advancement to candidacy and dissertation research and writing.

#### 2.12.2 *(Optional) Second-year paper stage*

At the *optional* second-year paper stage, the FAC is charged with advising on and evaluating the student's second-year paper. The Committee is tasked with awarding either a Pass or Fail. In the event that the second-year paper is awarded a Fail, the FAC will evaluate the revised paper.

#### 2.12.3 *Candidacy stage*

At the Candidacy stage, the FAC is charged with determining the readiness of the student to proceed with the Qualifying Exam (i.e., to take the Exam in their second or third years in the program). To reach this decision, the FAC reviews the student's GPA, participation in research during their time in the program, and annual reviews, which include evaluations from faculty. After the student passes their Qualifying Exam, and all other program requirements have been completed, the FAC recommends the student for advancement to candidacy. Typically, the Candidacy-stage FAC will include some or all the faculty the student expects to include on their doctoral-stage FAC.

To formally convene the Candidacy-stage FAC, the student should initially propose the Committee membership to their Faculty Advisor, who will typically serve as Chair; if approved by the advisor, the student should contact the desired members and invite them to join the Candidacy-stage FAC. Students should be aware that faculty members may in some instances be unable or unwilling to serve. The members of each student's Candidacy-stage FAC are approved by the Chair of the Public Health Graduate Group and the Dean of Graduate Studies prior to the Qualifying Examinations. The membership of the student's Candidacy-stage FAC is listed on the Graduate Division form *Application For Qualifying Examination* (available at <https://graduatedivision.ucmerced.edu/faculty-staff-resources/forms-publications>)

#### 2.12.4 *Doctoral thesis stage*

The Doctoral-stage FAC (D-FAC) is chaired by the Candidate's Faculty Advisor. The remaining Doctoral-stage FAC members are nominated by the Candidacy Committee with the concurrence of the candidate, the doctoral committee Chair, and the Graduate Group Chair or designee, as part of the advancement-to-candidacy process. The D-FAC must be composed of no less than three members of the Public Health Graduate Group. An additional outside member (e.g., of another UC Merced Graduate Group or from another university) can serve as a member if approved by the other members of the committee, the Chair of the Graduate Group, and the Graduate Division. The Candidate should initially propose a D-FAC to their Faculty Advisor; if supported by the advisor, the Candidate should contact the desired members and invite them to join the Committee. Candidates should be aware that faculty members may in some instances be unable or unwilling to serve. The composition of the D-FAC is formalized through an electronically-submitted form available from the Public Health Graduate Specialist.

The D-FAC may differ in membership from the Candidacy-stage FAC (and earlier FAC incarnations) to accommodate changes in the Candidate's research interests and available faculty expertise. Changes to the composition of the D-FAC *after* its initial formation must be approved by the Faculty Advisor, the Public Health Graduate Group faculty, and the Graduate Division.

### 2.12.5 Changing Committee Members

When changing committee members during or after their 2<sup>nd</sup> year of the doctoral program, students should fill out a new *Faculty Advisory Committee Appointment Form* (see Graduate Student Handbook) and turn in to the SSHA Graduate Specialist. The student should also complete a new faculty mentor/mentee compact and submit it to the Graduate Chair.

## 2.13 Normative Time to Degree

While time to completion of the degree will vary, a general expectation is that students will complete the majority of their course work and complete the Second Year Research Thesis by the end of their 2nd year, pass their Qualifying Exam and advance to Candidacy by the end of the 3rd year, pass their Dissertation Proposal and Defense by the middle of the 4th year, and defend their dissertation in their 5th year of study.

## 2.14 Typical Timeline and Sequence of Events

Sample Plan of Study for a Public Health Graduate Student					
	Fall Semester	Units*	Spring Semester	Units	Summer
<b>Year One</b>	PH 201: Foundations in Public Health PH 203: Research Methods in Public Health PH 211: Stats I PH 208a: Professionalization Seminar	4 4 4 2	PH 2xx Statistics II: PH 202: Epidemiology PH 2XX Elective or Topical Area Requirement PH 208b: Professionalization Seminar <i>First Year Review</i>	4 4 4 2 --	Research for optional second year paper
<b>Year Two</b>	PH 204: Environmental Health PH 210a: Grant writing seminar PH 2XX: Elective or Topical Area Requirement PH 290: Research units	4 2 4 2	PH 2XX: Elective or Advanced Methods Requirement PH 210b: Grant writing seminar PH 2XX: Elective or Topical Area Requirement PH 290: Research Units <i>Turn in optional second year paper**</i>	4 2 4 2	Summer Research experience (with faculty, community, gov)
<b>Year Three</b>	PH 2XX: Elective or Advanced Research Methods Prepare for the Qualifying Examination Formulate a Candidacy Committee <i>Qualifying Examination/ Advance to Candidacy</i>		Work on Dissertation Proposal		Work on Dissertation Proposal
<b>Year Four</b>	PH 297: Dissertation Research Dissertation Proposal Defense		PH 297: Dissertation Research		

<b>Year Five</b>	PH 297: Dissertation Research		PH 297: Dissertation Research <b><i>Dissertation should be completed and defended</i></b> by the end of the spring semester.		
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\*University-administered fellowships, graduate student researcher appointments, and academic student employee appointments require enrollment in 12 units during regular academic semesters.

\*\*Master's Pass students depart at the end of their 2nd year

## 2.15 Sources of Funding

Graduate students who received a funding offer with their admissions offer will have their financial support according to the terms of the funding offer. Funding will come through a combination of Teaching Assistantships, Graduate Research Assistantships, and/or Fellowships. Master's students are typically not expected to be funded by such means; but they may receive a funding offer with their admissions offer. More information on financial support can be found in the [Graduate Policies and Procedures Handbook](#).

## 2.16 Leaving the Program Prior to Completion of the PhD Requirements

Students cannot be admitted into the program with the intent of solely completing a MSPH/terminal master's degree. However, some PhD students may choose to leave the program after completion of their second year, or be judged as not meeting the requirements to complete the Ph.D. degree. Such a judgement is made by the Faculty Advisory Committee and is based on the following criteria:

- receiving a Fail grade on the optional second-year paper
- receiving a Fail grade on one or both parts of the Qualifying Exam upon a second QE attempt
- receiving two consecutive Unsatisfactory Progress evaluations

Students meeting one or more of these criteria may be recommended to leave the program by their FAC. Students who do not receive Unsatisfactory Progress evaluations or meet the other criteria, but who wish to leave the program for other reasons, may do so via the normal Withdrawal process (see <https://registrar.ucmerced.edu/policies/leaving-uc-merced>).

Students who elect or are judged not to meet the criteria for continuing the PhD degree will be notified in writing by the Graduate Group Chair of Public Health. A copy of the letter will be sent to the Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Education. In some cases a doctoral student may choose to leave the program with a master's degree only. It is the responsibility of the Public Health Graduate Group to notify the Graduate Division via the Change of Degree form so that the student's record may be updated to reflect the student's degree status. This notice must include the student's written permission to have their degree objective changed officially from doctorate to master's.

## 3. General Information

### 3.1 Planned Educational Leave Program (PELP), In Absentia and Filing Fee status

Information about the Planned Educational Leave Program (PELP), In Absentia (reduced fees when researching out of state), and Filing Fee status can be found in the Graduate Group Policies and Procedures Handbook, available on the Graduate Division Website:

[https://graduatedivision.ucmerced.edu/sites/graduatedivision.ucmerced.edu/files/page/documents/2020-21\\_gpph\\_-\\_gc\\_approved\\_6.30.20.pdf](https://graduatedivision.ucmerced.edu/sites/graduatedivision.ucmerced.edu/files/page/documents/2020-21_gpph_-_gc_approved_6.30.20.pdf)