Milken Institute School of Public Health

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

Department of Prevention & Community Health

Doctor of Philosophy
Social & Behavioral Sciences in Public Health

2025-2026

Note: All curriculum revisions will be updated immediately on the website:
http:www.publichealth.gwu.edu

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Mission
The mission of the Department of Prevention and Community Health in graduating Doctoral-level scholars within this specialty field is to create a cadre of professionals who are uniquely equipped to provide public health expertise and conduct research in the field of Social and Behavioral Sciences (SBS). Upon completion of the PhD, these accomplished researchers will be prepared to apply their research and analytic skills to a range of research questions as well as implementation, evaluation, and advocacy needs of various cultural and socioeconomic groups and communities.

Admissions Requirements
The Doctor of Philosophy Program is designed for professionals seeking to become public health researchers. Applicants who have completed an MPH degree from a Council of Education for Public Health (CEPH) accredited Program, or who hold a master's degree in a social, behavioral, or quantitative field will be considered for admission to the PhD Program. Applicants with a master's degree in another field may indicate their relevant training, work and/or research experience, or educational background comparable to the MPH that may have prepared them for doctoral level training in Public Health. As an accredited School of Public Health, the curriculum in all graduate academic programs must provide a foundation in public health. All students without a prior degree from a CEPH-accredited program or school of public health will be required to successfully pass the zero-credit, free, online Pathways to Public Health (PUBH 6080) course within one year of matriculation.

For the PhD, qualified applicants with degrees from institutions in foreign countries are also eligible for admission. Because admission to this program is highly selective, successful applicants should have competitive academic credentials and substantial prior public health professional work experience related to the specialty field to which they are applying.

PhD Competencies
The Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) Program prepares professionals to make significant scholarly contributions to the scientific and evidence base of public health. The PhD program will train strong theoretical, methodological, and practical scholars, whose contributions could be as practitioners or academicians. Our students will be well trained in a substantive health area with a strong background in theory of social and behavior change, study design and evaluation, and statistical methods. Upon completion of the PhD, students will demonstrate ability in the core competencies listed at the end of this document. Students also will have an awareness of, and adhere to, the ethical standards of the discipline for the conduct of scientific research as well as gain competency in classroom instruction and practices.

Foundational Public Health Knowledge
Students enrolled in the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) Program will demonstrate achievement of core public health knowledge areas listed at the back of this program guide.

Program Policies and Procedures
For program policies and procedures, please refer to the Doctor of Philosophy Social & Behavioral Sciences Handbook and other resources, located at the bottom of the following link: http://publichealth.gwu.edu/content/services-students.

Program-Specific Competencies
Upon completion of the PhD-SBS Program, students will be able to:

1. Synthesize the research literature in public health in a given topical domain, including the social and behavioral theoretical literature. Relevant courses: 8525, 8528, 8534
2. Examine and employ distinct theories, or a combination of theories, at multiple levels to study health outcomes. Relevant courses: 8525, 8528, 8419, 8534
3. Demonstrate advanced knowledge in the principles of evaluation and study design and data analysis as well as develop evidence-based questions. Relevant courses: 8419, 8417, 8534, 8526
4. Apply scientific knowledge to develop new conceptual models and/or research predictions, including justifying new questions with existing literature, selecting appropriate research models to study those questions, and indicating the potential contributions of the proposed research. Relevant courses: 8528, 8419, 8534, 8526, 8417
5. Demonstrate substantive knowledge within an area of social and behavioral sciences and display competency in communicating research ideas and findings to the larger scientific community. Relevant courses: 8525, 8528, 8526

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Program of Study
2025-2026

Curriculum Distribution Summary

- Total program = 48 credits
- Required Schoolwide Foundation Courses and Research Methods = 8 credits
- Required SBS Core Courses = 16 credits
- Electives = 15 credits
- Dissertation preparation and dissertation = 9 credits

UNIV 0250 - GRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANT CERTIFICATION. SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF THIS CERTIFICATION IS REQUIRED PRIOR TO TAKING ON ROLE AS TEACHING ASSISTANT. THIS ONLINE CERTIFICATION IS PAID FOR BY GW. THE 1-CREDIT RECEIVED FOR THIS CERTIFICATION IS NOT COUNTED TOWARD THE 48-CREDIT PhD PROGRAM.

Required Schoolwide PhD Foundational and Research Methods Courses
8 Credits

	Course Title	Credits	Semester
PUBH 6080^	Pathways to Public Health	0	Prior to end of Fall Year 1
PUBH 8475	Research Ethics and Integrity in Domestic and International Research	1	Fall Year 1
PUBH 8001	PhD Seminar: Cross Cutting Concepts in Public Health	1	Fall Year 1
PUBH 6862 OR PUBH 8418	Applied Linear Regression Analysis for Public Health Research OR Applied Statistical Analysis	3	Fall Year 1
PUBH 8416	Study Design and Evaluation Methods	3	Spring Year 1

^Students without a prior degree from a CEPH-accredited program or school of public health will be required to successfully pass the free, zero-credit, online course within one year of matriculation. There is no fee for this course.

Required SBS Core Courses
16 Credits

Course Number	Course Title	Credits	Semester
PUBH 8525	Advanced Topics in Social and Behavioral Science: Doctoral Seminar	1	Fall Year 1
PUBH 8528	Advanced Topics in Critical Review of Social/Behavioral Theory and its Application in Public Health	3	Fall Year 1
PUBH 8419	Measurement in Public Health and Health Services Research: Doctoral Seminar	3	Spring Year 1
PUBH 8417*	Qualitative Research Methods and Analysis	3	Spring Year 1 or Fall Year 2
PUBH 8534	Multi-Level Interventions for Health Promotion	3	Fall Year 2
PUBH 8526	The Application of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to Public Health Research	3	Fall Year 2

***Course may be replaced with EDUC 8257, PSYC 8258, or other doctoral level qualitative class, with advisor approval.**

Elective Courses 15 credits			
Course Number	**Course Title**	**Credits**	**Semester**
PUBH 6570**	Advanced Public Health Communication: Theory and Practice	3	Spring or Fall Year 2
PUBH 6887**	Applied Longitudinal Data Analysis	3	Spring Year 1
PUBH 8116**	Communicating Research Results	2	Spring Year 3
PUBH 8527**	Scientific Writing and Training Grant Development	1	Summer Year 1
****Recommended courses**			
Students interested in electives offered by other departments within the Milken Institute School of Public Health should access the Program Guides for those departments' doctoral programs, or the Schedule of Classes, to identify other electives offered. Course Descriptions may be found here: http://publichealth.gwu.edu/academics/courses.			
8000-level PUBH elective courses not listed above do not require advanced approval prior to enrollment. **Advisor's approval prior to enrollment is required for any other courses.**			
Dissertation Research 9 Credits			
Course Number	**Course Title**	**Credits**	**Semester**
PUBH 8435	PhD Proposal Development	2	Spring Year 2 Fall Year 3 Spring Year 3
PUBH 8999	Dissertation Research: PhD-SBS – *Prerequisites*: Successfully defending dissertation proposal	7	May be taken in increments of 1-7 credits

Graduation
While degrees are awarded at the end of each semester, formal commencement ceremonies occur only in May, including the doctoral hooding ceremony. Students are eligible to participate in graduation activities only after they have completed all degree requirements and have no financial obligations to the University. Students may include PhD designation after their name upon completion of all degree requirements.

Graduation Requirements

1. **Credits**: Successful completion of 48 credits.
2. **Curriculum**: Successful completion of all required courses.
3. **Comprehensive Examination**: Once the course of study is completed, students are required to pass the comprehensive exam to be officially admitted to the candidacy phase.
4. **Dissertation**: PUBH 8435: PhD Proposal Development plus 7 credits in dissertation research are required. Once the proposal has been successfully defended and the dissertation research credit requirement has been met, the oral defense may be scheduled.
5. **Grade Point Average**: A minimum overall grade-point average of *B* (3.0).
6. **Time Limit**: The degree must be completed within seven years of matriculation.
7. **CITI Training Requirement**: All students are required to complete training regarding human subject protection regulation and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA). To fulfill this requirement, you must complete the Collaborative IRB Training Initiative (CITI) Course in The Protection of Human Research Subjects.
8. **Integrity Quiz & Plagiarism Requirement**: All students are required to review the George Washington University Code of Academic Integrity, take the quiz within their first semester of study, and ensure documentation is submitted to the SPH Office of Student Records.
9. **Professional Enhancement Requirement**: Students must participate in 8 hours per degree program of advisor pre-approved Public Health-related lectures, seminars, and symposia, related to the appropriate field of study specifically focused on research and research ethics. Students must submit documentation of Professional Enhancement activities to the SPH Office of Student Records.

PhD Transfer Credit Policy
No transfer credits are accepted.

PhD Substitution Policy
With the approval of the program director, students can petition to waive and replace (or substitute) courses listed in the program guide to better fit their training needs and/or to ensure that classes taken are at the appropriate level for students. Please consult with the advisor and/or program director for replacing/substituting courses in the program guide.