



# Doctor of Philosophy Handbook

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# Introduction

The Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree is an advanced professional degree designed for individuals who desire to further a career in public health research.

The purpose of the PhD program is to produce graduates who have mastered competencies that enable them to engage in and lead hypothesis-driven research at universities and public health organizations. In addition, graduates will also demonstrate the ability to provide leadership to initiate, investigate, and solve public health challenges and the skills and knowledge necessary to act as an advocate for the formulation and implementation of public health promoting policies and strategies.

The purpose of this handbook is to provide the guidance for both public health faculty and PhD students during this complex and rewarding process. As with all such documents, this handbook is a work in progress. Suggestions for improvement are solicited and appreciated.

## Program of Study

Students enrolled in the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree program at the West Virginia University (WVU) School of Public Health have three concentrations to choose from: Epidemiology, Occupational and Environmental Health, or Social and Behavioral Sciences. Normally, the PhD program will take a minimum of three academic years to complete. Formal course work will generally take two academic years. The amount of time for individual students will vary depending on a variety of factors related to other time demands and overall career goals. The degree must be completed within seven calendar years as specified by West Virginia University Policy ([http://catalog.wvu.edu/graduate/advisingcoursesdegrees/degree\\_regulations/#timelimitstext](http://catalog.wvu.edu/graduate/advisingcoursesdegrees/degree_regulations/#timelimitstext)).

## PhD Program Competencies

All PhD program concentrations are driven by these four overarching competencies:

1. Develop effective strategies for teaching in higher education;
2. Review and synthesize pertinent literature and formulate focused research questions that address identified knowledge gaps;
3. Design and conduct original research that uniquely contributes to the public health scientific knowledge;
4. Disseminate research findings through appropriate peer-reviewed publications and presentations, and to other public health community audiences.

## PhD Program Sequence

Although the PhD program provides students with specialized training, the sequence and milestones students will strive to achieve during each year in the program is similar to the sequence as governed by the West Virginia University Health Sciences Center. The following pages detail the process all students will follow toward their degree completion.

### Year 1

#### 1. First semester:

If transfer credit for graduate work completed elsewhere is to be used, official transcripts must be sent to the Admissions Office of West Virginia University and an *Application for Graduate Credit Transfer* form (<http://www.hsc.wvu.edu/resoff/graduate-education/policies-and-forms/forms/>). Students may apply for no more than 12 transfer credits; however, students matriculating into the program in advanced standing do not need to transfer coursework. Students are typically matched with participating research rotation mentors and begin the first of three 8-week rotations with potential mentors.

#### 2. Second semester:

Students typically complete their second and third research rotations and the process of matching students with funded mentors begins. After consultation with the Program Director, file the *Committee Approval* form (<http://www.hsc.wvu.edu/resoff/graduate-education/policies-and-forms/forms/>) if a good student mentor match is identified. Note that the formation of dissertation committees may also continue into year 2 of graduate study. If membership of the Dissertation Committee changes during your program of study, a *Committee Membership Change* (<http://www.hsc.wvu.edu/resoff/graduate-education/policies-and-forms/forms/>) form must be completed.

### Year 2

#### 3. Formation of the Dissertation Committee:

Plan and complete your coursework and research agenda under the leadership and guidance of your sponsoring mentor and dissertation committee. Complete your *Plan of Study Form* (<http://www.hsc.wvu.edu/resoff/graduate-education/policies-and-forms/forms/>).

#### 4. The Qualifying Examination:

After you have completed your second year of coursework, you may be eligible for the Qualifying Examination. After successful completion of the Qualifying Examination complete the *Doctoral Qualifying Exam* form (<http://www.hsc.wvu.edu/resoff/graduate-education/policies-and-forms/forms/>).

**The Qualifying Examination MUST be successfully defended before beginning the dissertation.**

## Year 3

### **5. The Dissertation Proposal:**

Propose your dissertation concept, ideally during your first semester. Complete the *Doctoral Research Proposal Defense* form (<http://www.hsc.wvu.edu/resoff/graduate-education/policies-and-forms/forms/>). Successful defense of your dissertation proposal indicates your admission into PhD candidacy.

## Year 4

### **6. The Dissertation Defense:**

After successfully defending the dissertation, complete the *Shuttle Sheet Request* form (<http://www.hsc.wvu.edu/resoff/graduate-education/policies-and-forms/forms/>) as well as make any necessary changes to the dissertation that are recommended from the Dissertation Committee.

### **7. Apply for Graduation:**

Complete the *Graduation Application* form (<http://www.hsc.wvu.edu/resoff/graduate-education/policies-and-forms/forms/>).

## Research Rotations

In early September of Year 1, we will highlight the research activities of the graduate faculty available to mentor students for research rotations and to accept students in their research program. It is required that students rotate with three School of Public Health affiliated faculty and/or research centers, so that you will acquire a broad perspective of the research activities of the participating graduate faculty. The first research rotation typically begins the first week of October and lasts for eight weeks. The second and third rotations typically occur in the spring semester. Some program concentrations may allow longer rotations, but all rotations must be completed by the end of the summer semester of the first year in the program.

Before students begin their research rotations, we will ask you to submit three names of faculty with whom you would potentially like to work with to complete your research dissertation. While you will most likely receive your first choice, we reserve the option to match you with your second or third choice based on criteria including faculty funding, research interests, and competition with other first-year students for the same faculty mentor.

The objectives of these research rotations are:

1. to aid in choosing a faculty mentor for your dissertation research;
2. to learn the research area of other faculty in the Health Sciences Center- so that you can interact scientifically with faculty and members of other research centers, and;
3. to aid you in selecting faculty members for your dissertation committee.

NOTE: Students must submit a security clearance form before conducting a research rotation or dissertation research at NIOSH. Because of the time it takes to obtain security clearance, research rotations at NIOSH occur during the spring semester. Please be aware that a dozen or more people at NIOSH and CDC are involved in the submission and approval processes.

Therefore, NIOSH staff request that only those students who are really interested in the research faculty at NIOSH submit this form. If you are seriously considering doing research at NIOSH, seek assistance from the Office of Student Services to get your paperwork in order in advance.

### Research Rotation Expectations

Students will receive one research credit hour for each rotation satisfactorily completed. However, in keeping with the spirit of the rotation, students and faculty should agree in advance on the tangible “product” that will be generated through a particular rotation, in writing if necessary. The product should feasibly be completed within the given time frame and be mutually beneficial to the student and mentor. For example, acceptable products would include: a review of literature in an area, data analysis, assistance with manuscript preparation, or a review of a manuscript submitted for publication.

At the end of the eight-week rotation, faculty will submit an S (satisfactory) or U (unsatisfactory) grade for your performance during the rotation and a brief evaluation of your performance to the PhD Program Director. You will also be expected to submit a brief narrative evaluation of your rotation to the PhD Program Director. These evaluations will factor into the Director’s annual evaluation of your progress and performance.

The grade of I (incomplete) is given only when the instructor believes that the course work is unavoidably incomplete. All incompletes must be removed within one calendar year. However, an individual instructor may require their removal within a shorter time period. If you receive an incomplete grade, you must contact the faculty member who issued the incomplete to discuss its removal. If an incomplete is not rectified within one year, it will be changed to a grade of F. Incomplete grades require a Grade Modification Form that should be submitted electronically within one academic year. The instructor of the course, the PhD Program Director, and the Assistant Dean for Graduate Studies must approve this modification.

**NOTE:** You cannot graduate with a U grade on your transcript. If you receive a U on one of your research rotations, you must redo the rotation and improve the grade to graduate. In addition, the issuance of one U establishes eligibility for probation. Financial support is subject to termination by program or mentor. A second U in research may lead to dismissal.

## The Dissertation Committee

### Request for Dissertation Committee

- The Dissertation Committee Chairperson is the sponsoring mentor for doctoral students. The chairperson must have a doctoral degree, be a faculty member or affiliated with the School of Public Health (NIOSH included), have expertise within the student’s area of interest, hold regular graduate faculty status, and preferably have funding to support students during years 3 and 4 of their doctoral study. Students should conduct research rotations during year 1 with faculty who might serve as chairperson of their committee, or at least with whom they believe might serve as quality dissertation committee members. Students should feel free to discuss options with the Program Director in order to ensure the best potential matches.
- In conjunction with a student’s committee chairperson, a dissertation committee will be selected. The committee must consist of at least five members. At least three committee

members must be affiliated with the School of Public Health, two of which must represent the home department of the student through primary or secondary appointments. These three committee members must also hold regular graduate faculty status. One committee member must be from outside the home department of the student.

- The following are some considerations when organizing a committee:
  1. The chairperson should have expertise in the student's area of interest;
  2. One committee person should have expertise in the type of research and statistics that the student will be using in their research;
  3. Outside committee members should be content or research experts.
- Complete the *Committee Approval* form: <http://www.hsc.wvu.edu/resoff/graduate-education/policies-and-forms/forms/>.
- If membership of the Dissertation Committee changes during the program of study, a *Committee Membership Change* form (<http://www.hsc.wvu.edu/resoff/graduate-education/policies-and-forms/forms/>) must be completed.

### First Committee Meeting

After the committee has been selected, the committee should be convened by the student for the first committee meeting. The first committee meeting typically includes the following recommended agenda items.

- A brief proposal (1-3 pages) of what the student would like to accomplish for their research project. The student should receive tentative approval to pursue the area of interest. It is advised that students develop this proposal in conjunction with their dissertation chairperson in advance of this meeting.
- Complete a *Plan of Study* form: <http://www.hsc.wvu.edu/resoff/graduate-education/policies-and-forms/forms/>.
- Have a discussion of the format, timeline, and expectations of committee member responsibilities.
- Make sure meeting minutes are in the approved format within the Health Science Center (see Appendix for details sample).
- Committee Chairs should also complete the *Advisory Committee Evaluation* form following each meeting. This form is to be signed by all committee members. The original goes in the student's file, a copy is kept by the student, and a copy is sent to the Office of Student Services (see Appendix for details).

### Committee Meetings in General

- It is strongly advised that students meet with their dissertation committee at least once a semester, keeping in mind that five members are not always easy to convene. One such meeting is required each year.

## The Qualifying Examination

The Qualifying Examination is the capstone experience for PhD program coursework. Successful completion of the examination signifies competence in the field of public health sciences and indicates readiness to engage in independent research. The Qualifying Examination consists of both a written and oral component. Qualifying exams should not include testing on content of the dissertation. The oral defense of the dissertation proposal will serve that purpose. The Qualifying Examination is planned and administered by the five-member Dissertation Committee, under the direction of the Committee chairperson. If necessary and at the discretion of the PhD Program Director, another faculty member may be appointed to serve on the committee.

The oral portion of the exam may not be attempted until the written component is completed, and must be attempted within two academic weeks of the written component. Students are normally expected to take the qualifying exam during the summer session between their fourth and fifth academic semesters if not on advanced standing. However, the written component must be completed no later than the second week in July. Advanced standing students can take their qualifying examination anytime during Year 2 of their PhD program studies at the discretion of their Dissertation Committee. Students are not eligible to begin their dissertation, or enroll in dissertation hours, until they have successfully completed the Qualifying Examination.

Passage of the examination requires at least four affirmative votes and no more than one dissenting vote, whether the committee is composed of five or six members. Permission to repeat either the written or oral component of the exam is at the discretion of your dissertation committee. A third attempt at either part will not be permitted under any circumstances. Notification of the results of the comprehensive exam will be provided to the School by completion and submission of the *Doctoral Qualifying Exam* form (<http://www.hsc.wvu.edu/resoff/graduate-education/policies-and-forms/forms/>).

### The Written Exam Component

The format and coverage of the written exams will be determined by the student's Dissertation Committee in consultation with the student and PhD Program Director. However, the majority of the Committee must agree on the final format.

Topics to be covered are discussed and approved by the student's Dissertation Committee and based on the student's approved Plan of Study. In preparation for the exam, the chair of the Dissertation Committee will solicit up to six written questions from committee members and then compile a set of exams, formatted to be taken in 2 writing sessions. Exam questions will be agreed on by the Committee for fairness in advance of the examination. The exam for each writing session should be designed such that it can be completed in approximately 5 to 6 hours within a two-day period.

Evaluation of the exam must be done within 14 days after completion of the writing sessions. Committee members will be responsible for evaluating each of the questions they have submitted. Each question will have a primary reader that scores the question and a secondary reader that may challenge. All questions will be weighted equally. Each question will be worth 10 points and each student must score at least 70% to pass an individual



question. However, each student must maintain an average of 80% or greater across all exam questions to be successful.

The chair of the Dissertation Committee will compile the results of the evaluations and distribute them to the remainder of the Committee for discussion and to approve the result of the evaluations. However, Committee members should not share their evaluations of written examination with students until after the oral examination is completed, regardless of whether the student achieved the 80% threshold or not. The result of the oral examination will determine final qualifying examination outcomes. Once the written component of the qualifying examination has been evaluated by the Committee, the student will schedule the oral component of the comprehensive exam to be completed within an additional two academic weeks.

### **The Oral Exam Component**

The format of the oral component of the qualifying exam shall be determined by the Dissertation Committee in consultation with the student and will be moderated by the chair of the Dissertation Committee. The oral component of the examination will serve two purposes. First, Dissertation Committee members will be permitted (and expected) to ask follow up questions from the written portion of the examination, particularly in areas where the student scored below 70% on any individual question. Second, the student may be asked additional, new questions by committee members.

The oral component of the exam should be designed such that it can be completed in approximately 2 to 3 hours. Oral exams will be conducted in Executive Session (i.e., no public observers may participate). At the completion of the exam, the student will be excused from the room. The rubric below is offered to assist Committee members in assessing the performance of the student's oral exam component.

### ***Evaluation of Student Performance on the Oral Examination***

Each member of the Dissertation Committee will rate the student's performance on the oral component of the examination by using the provided rubric below. The scores the student receives from each Dissertation Committee member (and appointed member, if necessary) will subsequently be summed and averaged to the nearest whole number. This score will be provided to the student as feedback concerning his/her overall performance on the examination. However, to successfully complete the examination, (i.e. to "pass"), the student must receive a minimum of a "3" from the majority of the Committee.

Score	Behavioral Descriptors
5	Student demonstrates exemplary knowledge of course material across his/her Plan of Study. Student exhibits clear and consistent evidence of his/her ability to integrate knowledge from a variety of sub-disciplinary perspectives to address individual questions. Student is able to use knowledge obtained during coursework to address questions of practical importance. Student answers all questions in a concise, clear, and organized way.
4	Student demonstrates above average knowledge of course material across his/her Plan of Study. Student shows some evidence of ability to integrate knowledge from a variety of sub-disciplinary perspectives to address individual questions. Student is able to use knowledge obtained during coursework to address questions of practical importance. Student answers most questions in a concise, clear, and organized way.
3	Student demonstrates adequate knowledge of course material across his/her Plan of Study. Student shows some ability (after faculty prompting) to integrate knowledge obtained from across his/her curriculum to address individual questions. Student shows some ability to use knowledge obtained during coursework to address questions of practical importance. Student answers questions in a complete way, but not always in a clear and concise format.
2	Student demonstrates incomplete knowledge of course material across his/her Plan of Study (i.e. student is either knowledgeable in some coursework, but not in others or student shows below adequate knowledge across all areas). Student shows to no ability to integrate knowledge across courses in his/her curriculum. Student shows limited ability to address questions of practical importance.
1	Student demonstrates limited knowledge of course material across many or most of his/her Plan of Study. Student shows no ability to integrate information from various sub disciplines to address questions. Student shows limited ability to apply knowledge to practical situations.

### Evaluating the Overall Qualifying Examination

Once the Committee has come to a consensus on the student's oral examination performance, the Committee will discuss, vote on, and evaluate the student's performance on the entire Qualifying Examination (both written and oral components) as a Fail, Pass, or Pass With Distinction.

If the overall examination is evaluated as a failure, a remediation plan may be put in place by the chair of the Dissertation Committee and Program Director based on performance and circumstance. Such remediation plans must be addressed by the student and submitted back to the chair of the Dissertation Committee within an additional 14-day period, after which a final grade of Fail or Pass will be assigned. A failure in the remediation plan will result in dismissal from the Ph.D. program.

Upon successful completion of the qualifying examination, students are required to file a *Doctoral Candidacy Examination* form (<http://www.hsc.wvu.edu/resoff/graduate-education/policies-and-forms/forms/>) before the first day of classes during the fall semester.

### The Dissertation Proposal, Defense, and Approval

Although students may choose to pursue a traditional dissertation format, the majority of Ph.D. students will format their dissertation using the Three Journal Article Format (JAF). The

decision of which format to use is something that students should discuss with chairperson of their dissertation committee. As a reminder, students will not be allowed to defend their dissertations until they have at least one first-authored publication in any form of acceptance, based on their Ph.D. dissertation, in a peer-reviewed journal by the time of the dissertation defense. Note that this required publication does not necessarily need to be one of the three articles generated through the JAF dissertation format.

### Three Journal Article Dissertation (JAF) Guidelines

JAF format usually involves the joining of three full-length manuscripts (published or to be published) with introductory and summarizing sections. JAF guidelines are listed below:

1. The dissertation should have a coherent topic with an introduction presenting the general theme of the dissertation research and a conclusion summarizing and integrating the major findings.
2. The student should be primary author on at least 2 of the published or publishable works.
3. If an article(s) is multi-authored, justification of the contributions of the other authors in relationship to the research project should be clear. Issues of clarification should include origins of the conceptualization and design, the collection of data, analysis and interpretation of the data, and other significant areas of contribution. It is a given that the student should be significantly involved with every aspect of the dissertation.

The nature of the study will dictate the format and nature of each of the articles. The specific JAF format may vary and should be discussed with the dissertation committee chairperson. However, the following represent some examples of how the JAF may be constructed.

### JAF Format Models

1. **Single Study Format.** The dissertation is one study but with unique theoretical implications, adequate independent or dependent variables or sufficient data to support three articles. The flow of the JAF will vary with each study but should consider the following flow.
  - a. **Introduction:** This describes purpose and nature of each of the three or more articles. If the articles do allow for a comprehensive review of literature, the literature review can be included in this introduction.
  - b. **Article I:** This article should represent the primary finding for the study.
  - c. **Articles II & III:** The remaining articles could represent secondary analyses of data collected during the single study.
  - d. **Summary:** A concluding section should include a general discussion, conclusion, applications, and ideas for future research that comes from the three or more articles.
2. **Independent Studies Format:** Students may wish to conduct three or more independent studies with different populations, independent variables, or dependent

measures. The three independent study areas should all be within the student's desired area of expertise. Each can be reported independently. Using this format, the dissertation format would resemble something like the following.

- a. **Introduction:** This describes the purpose and nature of each article. If the articles do allow for a comprehensive review of literature, the literature review can be included in this chapter.
  - b. **Article I:** Is a complete article with introduction, methods, results, and conclusions for Study A and written within the guidelines for the identified journal.
  - c. **Article II:** Again, this is a complete and independent article with introduction, methods, results, and conclusions for Study B.
  - d. **Article III:** This third article is also independent for Study C.
  - e. **Summary:** A concluding section should include a general discussion, conclusion, applications, and ideas for future research that comes from the three studies A, B, and C.
3. **Interdependent Studies Format:** In the case of progressive experiments, students may want to use the interdependent format. Students may wish to determine the outcomes of part of the study before proceeding with the next portion of the study. Again, there may be unanswered questions that could be determined with a third study. In these circumstances, the dissertation would contain the following attributes.
- a. **Introduction:** This describes the purpose and progressive nature of each article. If the articles do allow for a comprehensive review of literature, the literature review can be included in this chapter.
  - b. **Article I:** This article would be an independent article with introduction, methods, results, and conclusions for Study A.
  - c. **Article II:** The study would build on Study A and lead into Study B. It would be an independent article with an introduction, methods, results, and conclusions for Study B.
  - d. **Article III:** Article C would build upon studies A and B as an introduction to Study C.
  - e. **Summary:** A concluding section should include a general discussion, conclusion, applications, and ideas for future research that comes from the three studies A, B, and C.

## The Research Proposal

Having received guidance from the dissertation committee, the formal research proposal can be developed and completed after all course work and Qualifying Examinations have been successfully completed. The proposal should include the following:

- An introduction with theoretical foundations and the most significant supportive literature, statement of the problem, and proposed methods.

## Formal Research Proposal

- The proposal draft must be distributed to the chairperson of the dissertation committee at least three weeks before the formal research proposal. Other committee members must receive the proposal draft at least two weeks before the formal research proposal.
- Students will be expected to present their formal research proposal to their dissertation committee in executive (not public) session.
- Directly following the research proposal, the student's dissertation committee will convene to approve the proposal or recommend revisions for a modified proposal to be submitted at a later time.
- Complete the ***Doctoral Research Proposal Defense*** form (<http://www.hsc.wvu.edu/resoff/graduate-education/policies-and-forms/forms/>). Successful defense of your dissertation proposal indicates your admission into PhD candidacy.

## Formal Dissertation Defense

- I. Upon completion of the dissertation, students defend the dissertation in a formal setting. This is a meeting of the Graduate Research Faculty, the dissertation committee, other students and faculty, and guests. Students will be expected to present the results of their research in a formal 30 to 40 minute presentation followed by questions and answers from those attending. The formal defense will be followed by a meeting with the dissertation committee in executive session to determine whether the dissertation defense was adequate or not. In most cases, there will be some corrections required.
- II. Students are required to post the time, date, and meeting place of the formal proposal two weeks prior to the defense. This information can be furnished to the PhD Program Director for disbursement.
- III. The written **FINAL** reading copy of the dissertation must be provided to the dissertation committee chairperson at least three weeks prior to the scheduled defense. All other dissertation committee members must receive their copy at least two weeks prior to the defense.
- IV. After successfully defending the dissertation, complete the *Shuttle Sheet Request* form (<http://www.hsc.wvu.edu/resoff/graduate-education/policies-and-forms/forms/>) as well as make any necessary changes to the dissertation that are recommended from the Dissertation Committee.
- V. After the corrections are made, Complete the *Graduation Application* form

VI. (<http://www.hsc.wvu.edu/resoff/graduate-education/policies-and-forms/forms/>).

#### Electronic Submission of the Dissertation

As of August 15, 1998, WVU requires the electronic submission of all dissertations (ETD's). See <http://www.wvu.edu/~thesis/> for one-stop-shop information regarding electronic submission of ETD's. In addition, consultants in the University's computer centers are prepared to help students and faculty in the process of preparing their ETD.

Please note that the Survey of Earned Doctorates (SED) is now online at <https://sed.norc.org/doctorate/showRegister.do>. PDF and printed versions are no longer accepted by the University Libraries. Questions may be directed to the ETD Program Coordinator, Molly Dolan or Debra Borekkua at [ETDReview@mail.wvu.edu](mailto:ETDReview@mail.wvu.edu) or 304-293-0342.

Given that the PhD program requires students to have at least one first-authored publication accepted for publication, based on their dissertation, in a peer-reviewed journal before they are permitted to defend their dissertation research, this may present some challenges for students when submitting their dissertations to ETD. Thus, students are advised to notify editors of the journals to which they are submitting their manuscripts that their journal article submission is derived from their dissertation and will be published electronically as a dissertation in the [wvuScholar](#) repository system. Upon online submission of the dissertation, students may select open access or campus access distribution of the dissertation, depending on the student and faculty committee desires and their individual publication situation.

Some publishers offer a click-through portal on their Journal websites to obtain permissions. However, the above language can also be inserted into a cover letter requesting author rights to archive an open access copy in their school's institutional repository, as an author addendum to accompany a publishing contract. Some publishers will grant rights for students to include a facsimile version of your published work, while others may request that you use a "pre-print" version of the accepted manuscript from your dissertation. You are encouraged to also visit information on intellectual property issues at <https://etd.lib.wvu.edu/>.

## Graduate Assistantships

Limited graduate assistantships are available to qualified fulltime students. Graduate assistants work up to 20 hours per week as teaching, research or service assistants. Graduate assistants may not hold more than the equivalent of one assistantship; graduate assistants are primarily students, and secondarily employees.

Graduate assistants receive a stipend, waiver of University tuition, and University health insurance. Payment of college tuition and University fees is the student's responsibility. Graduate assistantships in the SPH are of three types:

### Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTA):

GTA's are offered to students in furtherance of their program objectives, under the supervision and mentorship of a faculty member typically during their first two years in the program, and in some cases beyond. In most instances, GTA's are assigned to a particular course or courses, provided that the participating student is not evaluating peers in his/her same cohort. Typical academic/teaching duties may include, but are not necessarily limited to:

- Preparing materials or activities relevant to the teaching of a topic;
- Leading discussion or laboratory sections within a faculty-taught course;
- Holding review sessions before examinations;
- Proctoring examinations;
- Grading homework assignments and examinations;
- Holding office hours to consult with students on an as-needed basis;
- Assisting faculty members teaching undergraduate course sections.

Note that GTA duties do not fulfill a teaching practicum requirement as the GTA duties are carried out as an employee. Teaching practicum expectations are differentiated from the GTA duties by the student's department chair. No graduate student can be appointed to a GTA position after the second week of the semester.

### Graduate Research Assistants (GRA):

GRA's are offered to students to assist faculty with their research activities. GRA's are primarily funded by grants and other third party sources, and because the arrival of these funds at the University may not coincide with the beginning of an academic term, WVU policy is that the deadline for GRA appointments is no later than the end of the fifth week of classes. GRAs are typically offered to students during years three and four in the program and are ideally (although not required) tied to the student's dissertation research.

GRAs should not be considered simply clerical support for the research project, but should be involved in activities that help enhance students' research skills; develop PhD competencies; and extend the student's educational experience. GRA duties should not exceed 20 hours per week and are determined by the faculty who provide the funding for GRA position.

### Graduate Service Assistants (GSA):

GSA's are administrative opportunities in the management and operation of an academic department or other administrative unit. These positions are typically funded by the department or through central administrative funds. The GSA may not work more than 20

hours per week and the duties entailed are determined by the department chair or administrative head funding the GSA position. When appropriate, GTA and GSA duties may be merged (see table below).

### Assignment of GTA or GSA Duties and Responsibilities

The assignment of GA duties and responsibilities vary by how each position is funded. The table below delineates this variation for the type of GA position and by funding source as well as for fellowships/scholarships.

### Doctoral Student Funding Guidelines

Level	University	HSC	School	Department	Faculty
<b>Primary Intent</b>	Various	Recruitment	Administrative	Recruitment/Retention	Research
<b>Types</b>	Fellowships & Scholarships – various stipend/waiver packages	2-year GTA positions	1-year GSA position	Determined by department	GRA
<b>Eligibility</b>	New and continuing students	New students	New or continuing	New or continuing	New or continuing
<b>Student work expectations</b>	Prohibited except specified community service hours	GTA	GSA	GTA and/or GSA	GRA
<b>Who determines GA duties</b>	n/a	Receiving department	Academic Affairs or other funding entity	Department	Faculty funding GRA position

Graduate assistants are not considered student workers and their primary function should not be to provide routine clerical support (e.g., answering the phone, filing, running errands). Graduate students who primarily perform clerical support functions for a department or are hired on a short-term basis to perform research or administrative tasks should be hired as hourly student workers and should not be referred to as GA's, GTA's, GRA's or GSA's.

It is important that GAs be given the designation that best describes their primary function, responsibilities, and academic objectives. The title of GTA should not be given to graduate students who serve primarily as GRAs or GSA's.

All GAs are both protected by, and responsible for adhering to, WVU's general regulations and guidelines, including those concerning non-discrimination, equal opportunity, sexual harassment, academic integrity, student privacy, campus security, and appropriate conduct, as described in the WVU Student Rights and Responsibilities Board of Governors Policy 10 (see <http://bog.wvu.edu/policies> ).

Throughout the program of study, all graduate assistants must be enrolled full-time in the PhD program and must:

- Not be on academic probation;



- Be making satisfactory progress toward degree completion and have not exceeded WVU or SPH time lines for completing degree requirements, including qualifying examinations, dissertation proposal submission and approval, etc.

### Timely Assignment of GA Responsibilities

Each GA should be informed of his/her assignment(s) before the semester begins to allow for any required preparation. Each GTA should be assigned one (or in some cases, more than one) designated faculty mentor. The mentor is responsible for communicating clearly to the GTA his/her specific responsibilities, ideally in writing, and for ensuring that the GTA has the necessary resources to carry out assigned responsibilities. The suggested responsibilities are predicated on the needs of the department. The time commitment implied by a GTA (up to 20 hours a week) and assignments are assigned to the appropriate GTA level of skills, experience, and content knowledge.

Specifically in regard to GTAs, suggested responsibilities are listed below. However, GTAs are expected to attend all class meetings and/or do readings related to labs or discussion sections over which they have responsibility, unless otherwise assigned by the student's faculty mentor. The following guidelines are provided to assist in the assignment of duties for GTAs.

Beginning GTA (first year – no previous teaching experience) may:

- Help prepare and grade tests and other assignments.
- Hold office hours to provide individual guidance.
- Conduct labs or structured discussion sections.
- Work closely with faculty and/or more experienced GTAs.

Experienced GTA (successful completion of all C&I 789 “Teaching in Higher Education” and at least one year of GTA experience or prior demonstrated teaching experience). In addition to the responsibilities listed above for a beginning GTA:

- Design and lead discussion sections or labs.
- Prepare and deliver individual lectures.

Advanced GTA (at least two years of GTA experience at WVU with progressively more responsibility; significant content knowledge; and at least a master's degree or the equivalent course work completed toward his/her PhD). In addition to the responsibilities listed above for a beginning and experienced GTA:

- Functions as the primary instructor (but not the instructor of record) for a graduate (600 level only) or undergraduate course section(s), with responsibility for decisions on presentation of material, development of evaluation methods, and assignment of grades (GTAs cannot function as the primary instructor of 700 level doctoral courses).
- Assists the faculty in course development (syllabi, the selection of texts, etc).
- Has an assigned faculty mentor who assists in designing the course; reviews syllabi, handouts, exams, and other instructional materials; and regularly observes and provides feedback to the GTA.

The department Chairs and/or PhD program coordinators are responsible for monitoring the distribution of duties to ensure responsibilities are equitably distributed among GTAs/GSAs and for ensuring that assignments are appropriate given the student's level of experience.

### Terminations and Resignations of Graduate Assistantships

All PhD graduate assistants who do not perform their responsibilities satisfactorily will not be continued. Assistantships may be terminated at any time, as judged by the faculty mentor and concurred with by the Department Chair and/or PhD program coordinator, or Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, for poor academic progress or unsatisfactory performance. Prior to terminating a graduate assistant, the Department Chair and/or PhD program coordinator should inform the student of his/her inadequacies, document suggestions for improvement and a timeline for addressing deficiencies, offer additional assistance and/or mentoring, and/or suggest resources to aid the student's improvement. If no improvement takes place within the given timelines, the student's Department Chair and/or PhD program coordinator should request the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs/Office of Student Services to send the student a written notification that the award will be terminated, with a stated effective date. However, the School of Public Health reserves the right to terminate a graduate assistant without prior notice if, in the judgment of the student's Department Chair and/or PhD program coordinator, with the concurrence of the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, such action is warranted.

If a graduate assistant finds it necessary to resign his/her assistantship before the end of the appointment period, he/she should submit a letter of resignation at the earliest opportunity to their Department Chair and/or PhD program coordinator so that steps can be taken as soon as possible to find alternative coverage of the GTA or GSA responsibilities.

## Long-Term Leave of Absence Policy Graduate Programs in the Health Sciences Center

### 1. INTRODUCTION AND DEFINITION

Under certain circumstances, graduate students may request or have imposed a long-term leave of absence (LOA) during which they are recessed without stipend from the program for a specified duration. There are several categories under which a student may petition for a leave of absence: medical, personal, and academic. In addition, an administrative leave of absence may be enforced due to serious academic or professional deficiencies.

A long term LOA is a period greater than 1 calendar month duration during which time the student is not engaged in significant productive activity toward the degree. The LOA may last up to 1 year. WVU policy is that students can only be inactive in their program for 1 year after which time they would need to reapply for admission.

### 2. POLICY

The request for the long-term LOA should be presented in writing to the PhD Program Director and reviewed by the Department Chair who will then recommend to the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs the terms under which the student may return to the program. Following the agreed upon time of absence, a student in need of more time in recess will be officially withdrawn from the program, unless the above administrative groups grant an extension because of special circumstances. Once withdrawn from the program, individuals must reapply for and gain admission to resume their studies.

### 3. TYPES OF LEAVE AND PROCEDURES

- Student-initiated leaves:
  - Procedure: Request for a LOA must be initiated in writing. Student-initiated LOA requests use the Long-term LOA form. The student and the student's advisor (if applicable) should sign the form and present it to the Graduate Program Director. The request will be reviewed by the Program Director, Program Faculty and/or subcommittee and appropriate Dean. Upon acceptance of the request the student will be notified in writing and the letter will contain any applicable requirements for return to the program. Upon return to the program, the student presents any required documentation to the Graduate Director. Once the return is accepted, the Graduate Director signs the LOA form indicating that the leave is over. If a student chooses not to return from the LOA, they should submit a letter to the Graduate Director indicating this fact.
  - Medical LOA: This type of LOA is reserved for acute medical problems of a physical or mental health nature affecting the student or a first-degree relative requiring intense medical care. In order to return to the program, the student will present a letter of release from the treating physician clearly stating that they are fit to return to the rigors of a graduate program.
  - Personal LOA: This type of LOA is used for reasons of a personal nature affecting the student's ability to be successful in the program. These may include, but are not limited to requests regarding family-related issues unrelated to health, visa issues, or a reconsideration of career direction.
  - Academic LOA: This type of LOA is reserved for students who desire a recess from the program while currently unsatisfactory in a course prior to the issue of a final evaluation in that course. Student's leaving the program for this reason will have specific requirements for their return, which will generally involve successful remediation of their knowledge base. Return to the program will involve evaluation of the remediation as well as the entire academic record. Students who fail to successfully meet the criteria stipulated in the letter granting the leave may not be permitted to return. Should a student be permitted to return to the program, the Graduate Program will recommend if the student returns on academic probation or in good academic and professional standing. Students, who are recommended not to return to the program, must reapply and gain admission in order to resume.
- Administrative-initiated leave:
  - Procedure: The administrator (Graduate Director, advisor, Dean) initiates this request in writing. The LOA should indicate the reason for the leave, the length of the leave, and any requirements for return. LOA requests should be approved by the Graduate Director and appropriate Dean prior to presentation to the student. The student should sign the letter indicating that they understand the terms. Upon return to the program, the student presents any required documentation to the Graduate Director. Once the return is accepted, the Graduate Director signs the LOA form indicating that the leave is over. If a student chooses not to return from the LOA, they should submit a letter to the Graduate Director indicating this fact.

- **Administrative LOA:** This type of LOA is imposed by the Graduate Director and/or appropriate Dean for that Graduate Program due to academic or professional deficiencies, such as failure to progress in research, inattention to the academic or professional standards of a graduate student, or unexplained absence from the program of greater than 1 week. This type of LOA will be part of the student's permanent record.
- **Academic LOA:** This is the same as the student-initiated leave and is due to a deficiency in academic standing prior to the final evaluation in a course(s).

#### 4. EXCEPTIONS/CONDITIONS

**LOA with stipend:** In some circumstances, the student may not be in residence in the program for greater than one month but may be able to achieve significant progress toward the degree. During this time, the student may remain on stipend. Such agreements should be documented in writing and include:

1. Reason for leave
2. Duration and timing of leave
3. Planned activities during leave
4. Planned method of communication during the leave

The letter documenting these conditions must be signed by the Graduate Director and placed in the student's file.

**Extension of time in the program or to meet program-specific requirements:** If the student is unable to complete the degree within the University time limit for attaining the degree, they may petition for an extension equal to the time of the LOA. Petitions must be presented to the Graduate Director in writing 6 months prior to the end of this limit. Petitions for extensions of other program specific activities such as candidacy exams, seminars, etc. should also be handled in writing and occur prior to the semester in which the activity is to take place.

**Exceptions to the above:** Programs that are accredited may have specific residency requirements and the rules of the accrediting agency supersede these institutional guidelines.

**Failure to return:** If a student fails to return from the LOA on the specified time and has not made any request for an extension, they shall be immediately withdrawn from the program. Reentry into the program will require a new application for admission.

**Parental LOA:** This is a LOA due to the birth or adoption of a child.

- **Maternal Family Leave:** 6 weeks unless a doctor's letter indicates otherwise. Doctor's letter must be presented at the time of the request.
- **Paternal Family Leave:** 2 weeks

## Appendix

### REQUEST FOR A LONG-TERM LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Name:

Graduate Program:

Type of leave:

Personal  
Medical  
Academic  
Administrative

Person initiating request:

Date of the start of leave:

Date of anticipated return:

Reason for request:

Signature of student:

Signature of advisor:

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### UPON RETURN FROM THE LEAVE

Date of return:

Fulfillment of requirements for return:

Signature of Graduate Director:

Signature of Student:

Note: this form will be placed in the student's file

## Sample Letter granting a personal LOA

November 5, 2015

(insert student name and address)

Dear (insert student name),

The Graduate Program in the \_\_\_\_\_ approved your request for a medical leave of absence from November 9, 2012 to January 9, 2013 due to an (insert medical condition). Due to the medical nature of the request, a doctor's clearance will be needed to return to the program. As per the leave of absence policy, if additional time is required, please keep in mind that an extension should be requested. We hope for your successful recuperation and return to the program in good health.

Sincerely,

(insert signature)

Graduate Director, Graduate Program in \_\_\_\_\_

(insert signature)

Associate Dean/VP for Graduate Studies

cc: student's mentor's name here  
student's file

## Sample letter approving other types of leave

October 19, 2015  
(student name address)

Dear (insert student name),

The Graduate Program in the \_\_\_\_\_ approved your request for a personal/medical/academic leave of absence from \_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_.

Include any requirements for return to the program.

As per the leave of absence policy for the program, if you require more than a year before returning to the program, re-application for admission into the graduate program will be necessary.

Sincerely,

(insert signature)  
Graduate Director, Graduate Program in \_\_\_\_\_

(insert signature)  
Associate Dean/VP for Graduate Studies

cc: student's mentor's name here  
student's file

Student's signature















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