

SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES, DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (PH.D.)

Program goal

Training to be social and behavioral scientists

Students in the doctoral program in social and behavioral sciences will acquire the skills to become scientists, educators and scientists/administrators in a broad spectrum of positions and settings. Students will gain a progressive mastery of the current state of the subject matter in the social and behavioral sciences, an ability to synthesize the information and apply this foundation to the identification of key areas of investigation/experimentation and the ability to design and interpret studies that address the questions identified. In addition, students will develop the various means of communicating core social and behavioral science knowledge and particular study designs, results and interpretations to a variety of audiences.

Student learning outcomes

1. Critically evaluate social determinants of health through identifying gaps in literature and formulating strategies for improving health equity
2. Recommend and apply community-engaged principles in research design
3. Propose and justify analytical approaches for answering public health research questions assessed using qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods
4. Construct and critique theory-driven approaches for developing, implementing and evaluating health-behavior-change programs
5. Design and produce an independent public health research project

VCU Graduate Bulletin, VCU Graduate School and general academic policies and regulations for all graduate students in all graduate programs

The VCU Graduate Bulletin website documents the official admission and academic rules and regulations that govern graduate education for all graduate programs at the university. These policies are established by the graduate faculty of the university through their elected representatives to the University Graduate Council.

It is the responsibility of all graduate students, both on- and off-campus, to be familiar with the VCU Graduate Bulletin as well as the **Graduate School website** and academic regulations in individual school and department publications and on program websites. However, in all cases, the official policies and procedures of the University Graduate Council, as published on the VCU Graduate Bulletin and Graduate School websites, take precedence over individual program policies and guidelines.

Visit the [academic regulations section for additional information on academic regulations for graduate students](#).

Degree candidacy requirements

A graduate student admitted to a program or concentration requiring a final research project, work of art, thesis or dissertation, must qualify for

continuing master's or doctoral status according to the degree candidacy requirements of the student's graduate program. Admission to degree candidacy, if applicable, is a formal statement by the graduate student's faculty regarding the student's academic achievements and the student's readiness to proceed to the final research phase of the degree program.

Graduate students and program directors should refer to the following degree candidacy policy as published in the VCU Graduate Bulletin for complete information and instructions.

Visit the [academic regulations section for additional information on degree candidacy requirements](#).

Graduation requirements

As graduate students approach the end of their academic programs and the final semester of matriculation, they must make formal application to graduate. No degrees will be conferred until the application to graduate has been finalized.

Graduate students and program directors should refer to the following graduation requirements as published in the Graduate Bulletin for a complete list of instructions and a graduation checklist.

Visit the [academic regulations section for additional information on graduation requirements](#).

Apply online at [sophas.org](http://www.sophas.org) (<http://www.sophas.org/>) and submit a VCU supplemental application following instructions available at [sophas.org](http://www.sophas.org).

Admission requirements

Degree:	Semester(s) of entry:	Deadline dates:	Test requirements:
Ph.D.	Fall	Jan 6 (Priority consideration given to applications received by Dec 1)	English language proficiency (for international applicants)

Special requirements

- M.P.H. or equivalent M.A. or M.S. degree

Applicants must meet all general admission requirements of the VCU Graduate School (<https://bulletin.vcu.edu/graduate/study/admission-graduate-study/admission-requirements/>).

Degree requirements

The Ph.D. program in social and behavioral sciences, the only one of its kind in Virginia, prepares students to conduct theoretically based research and interventions on the social and behavioral determinants of health and disease. In addition to the general VCU Graduate School graduation requirements (<https://bulletin.vcu.edu/academic-regs/grad-graduation-info/>), a minimum of 54 post-master's credit hours is required for the doctoral degree, which is expected to involve four years of full-time study.

Comprehensive examinations

Comprehensive examinations include a written examination and an oral candidacy examination. The written examination assesses knowledge of

completed didactic course work on core social and behavioral science methods as well as a tailored substantive section based on the student's research focus. The oral candidacy examination is based upon the student's dissertation proposal, which consists of three proposed research projects.

Written comprehensive examination

Students are expected to take the written comprehensive examination after completing all didactic program courses (typically the program core, a responsible conduct of research course and six credits of electives). Program expectation for satisfactory academic progress is that students complete the written comprehensive examination by the end of the second academic year (i.e., no later than the end of the second summer semester). Exceptions beyond this time limit must be approved by the student's adviser and the graduate program director based on the student's submission of a written explanation for the delay in progress. This written explanation must include a plan of action and schedule for completing the written comprehensive examination by the date approved by the student's faculty adviser.

Oral candidacy examination

After passing the written comprehensive examinations, the student is eligible for the oral candidacy examination. For this examination, the student prepares background and methods for three proposed research projects in a focused area of dissertation research.

To maintain satisfactory academic progress in the program, students should complete the oral candidacy examination by the end of third fall semester. Exceptions beyond this time limit must be approved by the student's committee and the graduate program director based on the student's submission of a written explanation for the delay in progress. This written explanation must include a plan of action and schedule for completing the oral candidacy examination by the date approved by the student's dissertation adviser.

Upon successful completion of the oral candidacy examination, the student will embark upon their dissertation research.

Dissertation

The purpose of the dissertation is to provide the student with an educational experience that results in:

1. A significant contribution to the field of social and behavioral science
2. The knowledge and skills to make continuing important contributions to the student's field

The program requires that the final dissertation document be presented in the three manuscripts format. An alternative format may be approved by the candidate's adviser.

The dissertation must be a hypothesis-based, analytical project designed by the student under the supervision of the faculty adviser and dissertation advisory committee members as appropriate. The dissertation consists of a minimum of three papers prepared in manuscript style and suitable for submission to a peer-reviewed journal. One paper based in the dissertation research should be in a publishable format or ready to be submitted to a peer-reviewed scientific journal. The manuscript may have multiple authors but the doctoral student must be the first author.

Primary data collection is required for the dissertation. Requests for this requirement to be waived can be submitted to the program education committee.

To maintain satisfactory academic progress in the program, students should schedule the dissertation examination by the second semester of the fourth year. Exceptions beyond this time limit must be approved by the student's committee and the graduate program director based on the student's submission of a written explanation for the delay in progress. Plans for completion of the dissertation examination will be considered on an individual basis. Failure to maintain satisfactory academic progress may result in a grade of U (unsatisfactory) for the dissertation work.

Satisfactory academic progress

Satisfactory academic progress may be assessed on multiple factors, including progress on dissertation development in accordance with timelines established between the student and adviser and/or committee; lack of professional conduct, including communication lapses or failure to communicate with the adviser and/or committee about delays in progress and/or absence from research work; honor policy violations or academic misconduct; and failure to maintain continuous enrollment without an approved leave of absence.

Public health learning objectives

In addition to meeting VCU Graduate School and program requirements for graduation, all students enrolled in the School of Public Health must demonstrate competence in foundational public health learning objectives. This requirement is waived for students who previously completed a CEPH-accredited degree at the bachelor's, master's or doctoral level.

Course requirements

Course	Title	Hours
Required core courses		
BIOS 601	Analysis of Biomedical Data I	3
BIOS 602	Analysis of Biomedical Data II	3
SBHD 609	Research Methods in Social and Behavioral Health I	3
SBHD 619	Research Methods in Social and Behavioral Health II	3
SBHD 630	Theoretical Foundations of Social and Behavioral Health	3
SBHD 632	Health Disparities and Social Justice	3
SBHD 634	Patient-Provider Interaction ¹	3
SBHD 636	Community-based Participatory Research ¹	3
SBHD 637	Program Evaluation	3
SBHD 638	Applications in Qualitative Research Methods	3
SBHD 639	Intervention Development and Implementation	3
SBHD 640	Seminar in Mixed Methods Research	1
SBHD 690	Departmental Seminar (one credit course taken four times)	4
Required additional courses		
OVPR 601 or OVPR 602	Scientific Integrity Responsible Scientific Conduct	1

or OVPR 603	Responsible Conduct of Research	
Elective courses		
Any graduate-level courses approved by adviser		6
Dissertation research		
SBHD 697	Directed Research in Social and Behavioral Health (nine credits minimum)	9
Total Hours		54

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SBHD 692 may be taken if subject matter is appropriate; see adviser for approval.

The minimum total of graduate credit hours required for this degree is 54.

Students who complete the requirements for this degree will receive a Doctor of Philosophy in Social and Behavioral Health.

Contact

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