

HEALTH RELATED SCIENCES, DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (PH.D.)

Program mission/purpose

The Ph.D. in Health Related Sciences prepares students to develop solutions to complex health problems by conducting rigorous research and analyzing data. The program was designed for experienced working health professionals who are passionate about a particular subject and are ready to expand their understanding of that topic through research. Through the program, students have the opportunity to gain expert-level knowledge in their area of practice while learning research skills which can ultimately improve the health and well-being of their communities.

The program focuses on practice-based and problem solving knowledge which is threaded throughout the curriculum in order to prepare students to become leaders in education, research and administration upon graduation. Students entering the Ph.D. in Health Related Sciences program are not discipline or track dependent, which opens opportunities for people from various departments to be working on the same project in a collaborative manner. The Ph.D. program structure is flexible and accommodating to working professionals from a variety of disciplines, supporting students with up to date technology and educational designs that meet their needs. The curriculum is relevant, timely and meaningful.

Finally, the mission of the Ph.D. in Health Related Sciences supports the mission of the College of Health Professions in providing students with a high value education, equipping students with the knowledge and skills to be innovators in their field, conducting rigorous and fundable research, and having impact on the health and wellbeing of our communities.

Program goals

1. The program will provide students with the ability to understand and conduct research in health-related sciences.
2. The program will provide the student with the ability to analyze alternatives and develop responses in their disciplines to address the current and future challenges in health care.
3. The program will provide students with the skills to educate health professionals in their discipline using current principles of teaching and curriculum development.

Student learning outcomes

Students graduating from the PhD in Health Related Sciences program will:

1. Demonstrate the ability to design and execute research plans, analyze research results, present conclusions and discuss research findings in an area of interdisciplinary health sciences using appropriate research methods.
2. Demonstrate proficiency in scientific writing for the translation of research into practice.
3. Display expertise in educational design and professional skills related to interdisciplinary health sciences with application to future health care or academic practices.
4. Display the ability to examine current issues and future trends in healthcare theory, policy and the healthcare environment from an interdisciplinary perspective.
5. Demonstrate the ability to work with and for diverse populations in a sound and ethical manner.

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.

Other information Student handbook

A student handbook will be made available to all admitted students in their cohort organizations in Canvas.

Facilities

The administrative offices for the program are located on the MCV Campus at 900 E. Leigh St., Richmond, VA 23298. The Dean's Office is on the 2nd Floor.

Advising

Upon admission to the program, students will be assigned an interim adviser to guide them through the core courses and assist them as they consider their areas of research. All program advisers will have an earned doctorate and be members of the university's graduate faculty.

Students may change their interim advisers as their programs of study and interests evolve, if approved by the program director.

After successful completion of the comprehensive examinations, students will work with the program director and assigned adviser on identifying a dissertation chair that will serve as adviser and guide them through the research/dissertation process.

Computer requirements

All students admitted to the program must have a personal computer manufactured within the past two years and access to a high-speed Internet connection.

Apply online today. (<https://www.vcu.edu/admissions/apply/graduate/>)

Admission requirements

Degree:	Semester(s) of entry:	Deadline dates:	Test requirements:
Ph.D.	Fall (begins end of June)	Apr 15 (Jan 15 for priority consideration; after Apr 15 considered on space-available basis)	

Special requirements

- It is recommended that prospective applicants contact the program in advance of submitting an application to discuss research interests and the program's blended structure. When required, applicants must have a minimum Test of English as a Foreign Language score of 600. The Ph.D. program in health related sciences utilizes two six-month semesters per year (January through June and July through December), which include both on- and off-campus components.
- Some research areas have additional licensure and certification requirements. Applicants should contact the program director for additional information.

In addition to the general admission requirements of the VCU Graduate School (<https://bulletin.vcu.edu/graduate/study/admission-graduate-study/admission-requirements/>), applicants must meet the following criteria:

1. Have an earned master's degree in an academic or allied health-related field from an accredited college or university (Preference will be given to applicants who have a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.3 on master's-level work.
2. Have completed a three-credit graduate course in statistics (including topics such as random variables, probability, distributions, descriptive statistics, hypothesis testing and inferential statistics) with a minimum grade of B
3. Provide a writing sample (All applicants are required to complete a writing sample assignment. This writing sample activity will take

one hour and will focus on important health care topic issues.

Applicants will schedule a time for the writing sample activity with the program director prior to the application deadline.)

4. Demonstrate a record of professional competency and success
5. Articulate clear professional and educational goals and written communication skills through the submission of a written essay

Prior to reviewing an application for admission, the program must receive:

1. A completed application form from the applicant, including:
 - a. Three letters of recommendation, two of which preferably are from sources qualified to assess the candidate's academic potential
 - b. A written statement of intent that discusses career goals and the manner in which this doctoral program will enhance those goals and what the applicant expects to contribute to this program
 - c. A curriculum vitae
2. Official transcripts indicating completion of baccalaureate and master's degrees (or equivalent) from an accredited college or university

Incomplete applications will be held in the director's office until all materials are received.

Completed applications will be sent to the admissions committee for the College of Health Professions doctoral program. Based on the review, a personal interview will be scheduled at the admissions committee's discretion.

The admissions committee will make final recommendations regarding the incoming class. The director and the dean of the College of Health Professions are responsible for the final decision.

Applicants will be notified by the Graduate Admissions office regarding the admission decision.

Degree requirements

In addition to general VCU Graduate School graduation requirements (<https://bulletin.vcu.edu/academic-regs/grad/graduation-info/>), students must successfully complete a total of 51 credit hours (18 credit hours of common interdisciplinary core courses, 12 credit hours of research methods core courses, nine hours of independent study focused on research area and 12 credit hours of dissertation research), two comprehensive examinations, a research proposal defense and the final dissertation defense.

Curriculum structure

The proposed curriculum is designed to take four years to complete. Students spend the first two and one-half years (six-month-long semesters) completing course work. The final year and one-half is spent developing the doctoral dissertation. Research components are present in each year of the program, and a research emphasis is present throughout the entire curriculum. Students are required to designate the area of intended research prior to being admitted.

Each of the five course-work semesters is composed of both on- and off-campus components. On-campus sessions, scheduled during the end of June and beginning of July and at the beginning of January, will employ a rather traditional mix of educational technologies (e.g., lectures, seminars and assigned reading). During the off-campus component of each semester, students pursue their studies employing a wide variety of innovative educational technologies (e.g., computer

conferencing, computer-aided instruction, videotape packages and programmed instructional material), in addition to assigned readings and the completion of various assignments and projects. Upon completion of the five semesters of course work, students are required to return to campus each semester until a research proposal has been developed and successfully defended.

Continuation requirements

After admission to the Ph.D. program, the student must maintain a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.0 in all of the course work completed at VCU. A student who falls below that minimum will have one semester to remedy the deficiency. Even with an overall minimum GPA of 3.0, a student may earn no more than two (six credit hours) grades of C. Students who receive a grade of D or F will be reviewed for continuation in the program.

Students are expected to maintain continuous enrollment while in the program. Following the completion of the core course work, students must register for at least one credit hour each fall and spring semester for continuation in the program. A student who fails to register must have advance approval to do so or will be dropped automatically from the program and must reapply for reinstatement. The maximum time to complete all of the requirements for the degree is eight calendar years from the date of entry into the program.

Course transfer or waiver

A maximum of 25 percent of the course work other than research may be transferred from another VCU program or outside institution and applied toward the Ph.D. course requirements. Transfer and waiver credit is given at the discretion of the program director after consultation with appropriate faculty members, subject to university approval. Courses taken as requirements for other degrees are not transferable. A waiver may be warranted if an equivalent course was taken. However, another course must be substituted for the waived course in order to fulfill the requisite 51 credit hours needed for degree completion.

Comprehensive examination

The purpose of the comprehensive examination is to provide a vehicle through which students can demonstrate the ability to integrate their educational experiences by adequately addressing complex questions pertinent to the current and developing knowledge of the allied health fields. Students are eligible to take each of the two comprehensive examinations upon successful completion of the appropriate core course work. The core exam must be taken within six months of completing the methods exam provided that core courses are completed.

Two written examinations will be administered, one for the common interdisciplinary core and one for the research methods core. A three-member graduate faculty committee will develop and administer each exam. This committee will be made up of two members of the core faculty and one member appointed by the program director. Each exam will be offered once in the fall semester and once in the spring semester. Prior to completion of the semester in which students become eligible to take each exam, they must submit a formal statement of intent.

Students who receive a failing grade on the initial attempt will have one opportunity to repeat each comprehensive examination. Failure to pass an exam on the second attempt will result in dismissal from the program.

Curriculum requirements

Course	Title	Hours
Interdisciplinary courses		
ALHP 701	Health Services Delivery Systems	3
ALHP 702	Finance and Economic Theory for Health Care	3
ALHP 708	Health Science Ethics	3
ALHP 712	Instructional Design and Evaluation for Health Sciences	3
ALHP 716	Grant Writing for Health Science Research	3
Research methods		
ALHP 760	Descriptive and Univariate Statistical Methods for Health Sciences	3
ALHP 761	Health Science Research Design I	3
ALHP 762	Multivariate Statistical Methods for Health Sciences	3
ALHP 763	Health Science Research Design II	3
ALHP 765	Data Management for Health Science Research	3
Independent study		
ALHP 781	Doctoral Seminar	3
ALHP 792	Independent Study (three credit hours required)	3
ALHP 793 or ALHP 795	Research Practicum Teaching Practicum	3
Dissertation		
ALHP 890	Dissertation Seminar	3
ALHP 899	Dissertation Research	9
Total Hours		51

The minimum total of graduate credit hours required for this degree is 51.

Students who complete the requirements for this degree will receive a Doctor of Philosophy in Health Related Sciences.

Contact

Laurie Cathers, Ph.D., LSW
Graduate program director
s2lasaff@vcu.edu
(804) 827-0912

Additional contact

Lauren Mortensen
Senior program specialist
lcmortensen@vcu.edu
(804) 628-5298

Program website: phd.chp.vcu.edu (<https://phd.chp.vcu.edu/>)