

HEALTHCARE POLICY AND RESEARCH, DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (PH.D.)

Program goal

The doctoral program in healthcare policy and research trains students to understand the economic, political and social factors that affect access to care and the quality and cost of health care. Graduates of this program will have strong methodological and theoretical skills that will prepare them to make important contributions to the fields of health care policy and public health. Their training will enable them to add to scientific knowledge about how health policy, social factors, financing systems, organizational structures, care processes, health technologies and personal behaviors affect health care outcomes.

The program is structured to provide progressive mastery of the design and analysis of health services research. Program graduates will be able to formulate health care policy; to plan, implement and evaluate health programs and policies; and to interpret research findings in ways that are practical and policy-relevant to a variety of audiences. Trainees obtain experience working with colleagues in public health, medicine, psychology and other disciplines and to advance to positions as health policy researchers in academia, government or the private sector.

Student learning outcomes

1. Content and theory: Students will critically articulate how health policies are developed, implemented and evaluated.
2. Critical and analytical thinking: Students will accurately analyze and synthesize health policy research.
3. Research methods: Students will demonstrate proficiency in designing, conducting and interpreting health policy research. Students will write and submit a grant proposal.
4. Effective communication: Students will communicate effectively to translate and disseminate research findings for health policy audiences.

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 (<http://www.graduate.vcu.edu/>) 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. (<http://bulletin.vcu.edu/academic-regs/>)

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. (<http://bulletin.vcu.edu/academic-regs/grad/candidacy/>)

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. (<http://bulletin.vcu.edu/academic-regs/grad/graduation-info/>)

Other information

Enrolled students may access the program handbook on Blackboard.

School of Medicine graduate program policies

The School of Medicine provides policies applicable to all programs administratively housed in the school. Information on **doctoral programs** is available elsewhere in this chapter of the Graduate Bulletin.

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 15 (Applications received prior to this date given priority consideration.)	GRE; TOEFL for international students

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

1. A college-level course in calculus with a minimum grade of B is preferred.
2. Applicants must have graduated from an accredited university or its equivalent, with a master's degree in a related discipline (e.g., economics, public health, public policy, health administration, public administration). Applicants must have completed relevant course work (including microeconomics and introductory statistics) or have professional experience in a health-related field (two years minimum) that provides an appropriate background for graduate-level study in healthcare policy and research.
3. Applicants must have taken the Graduate Record Exam within the past five years; scores in the 75th percentile are preferred.
4. Applicants from countries where English is not the primary and official national language must complete one of the following:
 - a. English proficiency verification through official TOEFL score 550 or higher
 - b. Graduate with a master's degree following two years of study at a U.S. institution
 - c. English language proficiency certification through appropriate English training programs at other U.S. institutions, or English language proficiency certification by passing the English Language Proficiency Examination and/or the corresponding English Language Institute courses

VCU policy also requires that prospective students who have studied outside of the U.S. must provide an official WES or ECE external credential evaluation as a required part of the admissions process.
5. Applicants must present three letters of recommendation from individuals who are in a position to judge their ability to engage in interdisciplinary graduate study in healthcare policy and research. At least one recommendation must be from an individual who can comment on the applicant's academic qualifications (e.g., former instructor or adviser).
6. Applicants must provide a written statement of professional intent that includes the proposed area of research and identifies the faculty member(s) with which the applicant is interested in working.
7. Applicants must present a curriculum vitae or resume.
8. A recent writing sample, such as a first author, peer-reviewed publication; a master's thesis; a book chapter; a policy brief or report; or a graduate course paper is required. An undergraduate course paper may be substituted if none of the above is available.
9. Prospective students must be available to interview either in person or teleconference via technology such as Zoom.

Degree requirements

In addition to the general VCU Graduate School graduation requirements (<http://bulletin.vcu.edu/academic-regs/grad/graduation-info/>), a cumulative GPA of 3.0 must be maintained. Students must receive a minimum grade of B for all required courses. A student who receives a grade of C in a required course shall repeat the course. A second grade of C in a required course shall result in dismissal from the program. At the discretion of the HCPR committee, a student who is retaking a required course may still be eligible to take the comprehensive examination and to start the dissertation prior to repeating the course.

At the end of the second year of required course work, students will take a written comprehensive examination designed to evaluate the student's ability to:

1. Integrate course material
2. Demonstrate critical thinking and evaluation of the literature in healthcare policy and research
3. Demonstrate quantitative analysis skills

After passing the written comprehensive examination, the student will schedule the proposal defense within six months. Following successful defense of the proposal, the student will prepare three manuscripts of publishable quality that will comprise the body of the dissertation and will orally defend the dissertation. It is anticipated that students will complete the program in four to five years. All requirements for the Ph.D. degree must be completed within six years from the date of admission to the degree program. Extensions may be approved in extenuating circumstances.

Course requirements

Course	Title	Hours
Required core courses		
ECON 501	Introduction to Econometrics ¹	3
ECON 612	Econometrics	3
ECON 642	Panel and Nonlinear Methods in Econometrics ²	3
EPID 571	Principles of Epidemiology	3
HCPR 699	Departmental Seminar (one-credit course taken four times)	4
HCPR 701	Health Services Research and Policy I	3
HCPR 702	Health Services Research and Policy II	3
HCPR 703	Health Economics: Theory and Principles	3
HCPR 720	Economics of Health Disparities	3
HCPR 730	Survey Research Methods and Analysis for Health Policy	3
HCPR 732	Research Design and Proposal Preparation	3
HCPR 733	Statistical Methods in Analysis of Healthcare Research	3
HCPR 734	Economic Evaluation and Decision Analysis in Health	3
Required additional courses		
OVPR 601	Scientific Integrity	1
or OVPR 602	Responsible Scientific Conduct	
or OVPR 603	Responsible Conduct of Research	
Elective courses		
Choose any graduate-level courses approved by adviser.		9
Dissertation research		
HCPR 899	Directed Research (nine credits minimum)	9
Total Hours		59

The minimum total of graduate credit hours required for this degree is 59.

¹

BIOS 553 may be substituted with approval

²

BIOS 625, BIOS 631 or BIOS 647 may be substituted with approval

Typical plan of study

Many students often end up taking more than the minimum number of hours required for a degree program. The total number of hours may vary depending upon the program, the nature of research being conducted, or the enrollment or funding status of the student. Students should refer to their program websites and talk with their graduate program directors or advisers for information about typical plans of study and registration requirements. This program has a typical time to degree of four years. For additional information, see the departmental website.

Contact

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