



Procedures & Guidelines for PHS-SBS PhD Students

These procedures and guidelines are designed to guide PHS students in Social and Behavioral Sciences through the various milestones during their doctoral program. The Table highlights required elements, which are explained in detail below.

PHS-SBS Timetable

Required Process and/or Documentation	Timing (from the start of the program)
Prospective Program Form	Due end of 2 nd semester
Tracking Sheet	Due beginning of 4 th semester
Complete all coursework	End of 4 th semester
Written Qualifying Exam (Preliminary Qualifying Exam I)	End of 4 th semester (all coursework must be completed)
Final Program Form	Due early in the 5 th semester (following successful completion of the written exam usually by September 30)
Oral Qualifying Exam (Preliminary Qualifying Exam II) Scheduling Form	By middle of 5 th semester (usually by Nov. 15 th)
Oral Qualifying exam (Preliminary Qualifying Exam II)	By end of the 5 th semester
Dissertation Advisory Committee Nomination Form	One month after successful completion of Oral Exam
Dissertation Advisory Committee (“Progress Report”) Report Form: must be submitted every three months until the dissertation defense	3 months after passing Oral Exam
Dissertation Advisory Declaration Defense Scheduling Form	Due at least 3 weeks in advance of defense date.

Prospective Program

The Prospective Program is a preliminary plan in which students list the formal coursework they intend to take to support their chosen major and minor fields of inquiry. Students need to declare a minimum of 20 HSPH credits (16 GSAS) to comprise the major field and a minimum of 10 HSPH credits (8 GSAS) for each of the two minor fields. These credits must be outside of the PHS Core courses.

Guidelines

- The proposed major and minors should be directly related to your planned dissertation research. Note that changes to your major and minors (as well as to the listed courses) may be made on the final program if there are changes to your research plans.
- Declared majors and minors must be established academic fields of inquiry with at least one associated peer reviewed journal (e.g. Health Communication).
- Your major should be directly related to your course work in Social and Behavioral Sciences but the exact title of the major is flexible. The majors should reflect a field of inquiry that is reflected in the academic content in the department. *Examples of majors and minors are listed on pp 8-9.*
- Your major and minors should be relevant to your dissertation research and should be reflected in the composition of your committee.
- Core PHS courses do not count towards the major or minors. SBS Field of study requirements may count.
- Each course listed in the Prospective Program must be a formal, non-independent study, non-tutorial, non-research course taken for ordinal (i.e. A, A-, B+ or B) credit. *Exceptions exist for formal courses that are not offered for an ordinal grade (eg. WGH 207.)*
- A grade of B or better must be obtained in all the courses proposed for majors and minors. Each course counted towards the major or minor must be taken for graduate credit.

Advisor Responsibilities: Your advisor should:

- Assist you with developing your majors and minors based upon your potential dissertation topic and your planned course work
- Critically review your prospective program with you
- Sign the prospective program once you both agree on its contents

Tracking Sheet

Students are expected to keep a record of all required coursework (64 GSAS credits) during the first two years of the program. The PHS-SBS Tracking Sheet, which fulfills this purpose, should be utilized and filled in each semester as the student progresses through the program. The tracking sheet can be found on the [SBS Curriculum Guide webpage](#).

Advisor Responsibilities: The advisor should:

- Review your tracking sheet each term and provide advice for course work relevant to your planned area of expertise and dissertation topic

- Prior to drop/add deadline of the 4th semester review the tracking sheet and sign to verify that the student will complete all degree course requirements no later than the end of the 4th semester.

Preliminary Qualifying Exam (PQE) I / Written Qualifying Exam

It is the policy of the Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences that, to earn a doctoral degree, students should acquire a breadth of knowledge in their fields that extends beyond the subject matter of their dissertation. All doctoral students in the SBS field of study will take written qualifying examinations to demonstrate this knowledge.

Normally, the exam is taken at the end of the 2nd year of doctoral work. Anyone considering a variation to this schedule should discuss it as soon as possible with their advisor. A completed tracking sheet must be submitted to the Department by the end of January prior to taking the exam to signify that the student has completed all necessary course requirements. The exam is given in late May each year. In November of each year, dates and other details are provided to all students who are eligible to take the exam in the upcoming year. Students may access copies of past exams, but are cautioned to understand that the type of questions and content of the exam is likely to change from year to year. Exams are provided as a means of guiding study but do not represent the planned content of future exams.

Final program

The purpose of the Final Program Form is to provide documentation that the student has developed a major and two minor fields of study that are related to the proposed dissertation research, and to nominate the members of the PQE II/Oral Examination Committee. Following successful completion of the Written Qualifying Exam, each PHS student must complete a Final Program Form in consultation with their advisor early in the 5th semester (usually by Sept 30th). Once completed, the form should be signed by all proposed committee members and the advisor and then emailed to the SBS academic affairs team. The SBS administrators will then review, sign and forward it to the PHS Program Office for approval. Final approval of the program and committee membership is completed by the PHS Faculty Director who will also assign the committee chair. The PHS Office will then notify the student and the PQE II committee chair (typically within 10 business days). Upon approval, the student should schedule their PQE II.

Procedure for Submitting the Final Program

- Fill out the Prospective/Final Program Form (this can be found on the PHS Sharepoint.) Meet with your advisor to discuss changes from the Prospective Program, goals and objectives for doctoral research, and the selection of the PQE II/Oral Examination Committee members. This discussion typically begins within 2 weeks following successful completion of the Written Examination.
- Request meetings with potential Oral Committee members, and confirm their willingness to participate.
- List all formal coursework in major and minor fields, including grades received.
- List the nominees for Oral Examination Committee. Note: Your primary advisor can and should be part of your Oral Examination Committee. On the form, you should list what topic they will

examine you in.

- Write a detailed statement of research goals and objectives including methods and hypotheses for each of the three papers. Suggested length is around five sentences per paper.
- Obtain the required signatures of the proposed committee members.
- Submit the form to the SBS academic administrators for review, approval and submission to the PHS Office.

Oral Qualifying Exam (PQE II)

The PQE II focuses on the dissertation proposal, and is designed to determine that the student is ready to begin conducting their dissertation work. The Exam is administered by a PQE Committee that is created by the student and their advisor. *In most cases, each committee member is a Harvard assistant, associate, or full professor, lecturer or senior lecturer. The PQE Committee should consist of: (1) the student's advisor; (2) another SBS faculty member; and (3) a faculty member who has relevant expertise in the student's majors/minors but may or may not be external to SBS (or Harvard.) eg. We've had an MIT faculty member whose research is at the intersection and public health and urban planning serve on SBS students' dissertation committees over the years.* The student's advisor cannot serve as chair of the PQE II. If there are special needs for other expertise, it is possible to appoint a fourth member. Decisions on committee membership should ultimately be made in consultation with your advisor.

While it is preferable that non-Harvard faculty are within reasonable physical proximity, students may continue holding remote PQE IIs, Committee Meetings, and Dissertation Defenses via Zoom, in-person, or as a hybrid for the foreseeable future. As PHS candidates' governing school, GSAS/FAS does not put any limitations on remotely offering these options. As such, the PHS Program will continue to allow PQE IIs, Committee Meetings, and Dissertation Defenses remotely via Zoom, in-person, or as a hybrid of the two – at the discretion and availability of the Committee, advisor, and PHS candidates.

The PHS Program identifies the PQE II Chair from among the nominated committee members *(most often it will be the other SBS faculty member appointed to the committee.)* The Chair, whose responsibilities are purely administrative (e.g. run the meeting, ensure that required forms are available at the meeting and submitted following the meeting), is typically from the same Field of Study as the student. The student does not have any responsibilities related to selection of the PQE II chair.

Students and their committee members will be notified by the PHS Office when their Final Program has been approved and then can schedule their PQE II/Oral Qualifying Exam.

Procedures for Submitting the PQE II Scheduling form

- Once the Final Program has been approved by the PHS Office, the student can begin the steps needed to complete the PQE II Scheduling form, which can be found on the PHS Sharepoint.
- Select a date and time with all committee members. Advance planning is usually needed to accommodate all members' schedules.
- *Create a Zoom meeting or schedule a conference room for the Oral Qualifying Examination through the academic affairs staff.*
- Fill out the form and collect signatures from each committee member.

- Submit the form to SBS academic administrators for review and submission to the PHS Office. This must be done at least three weeks prior to the Examination.

Procedures leading up to the PQE II / Oral exam and day of exam

- We expect students will be regularly meeting/communicating with their advisor and committee prior to their PQE II. The following are the formal steps taken to conduct the exam: The final proposed plan of research should be distributed via email to the Oral Examination Committee approximately three weeks prior to the exam. In the unlikely event that updates to proposal are required, they must also be submitted electronically. The research proposal has a formal scientific format, and should include plans for three publishable papers that typically includes the following content: research objectives, research approach and description of methods, anticipated findings, anticipated problems and potential mitigation strategies, and the overall significance of the research. *Please consult the PHS Handbook for more examples of how to format your research proposal.*
- Meet with members of the Examination Committee prior to the examination. The student is encouraged to meet with each examiner to discuss issues or concerns regarding the proposal or academic preparation. This is an opportunity to set expectations for providing members with drafts of the proposal and receiving their feedback. Although there is no set requirement for how much feedback students receive in advance, the Curriculum Committee generally feels that it is in students' best interests to receive feedback on a draft of the proposal prior to the Oral Exam.
- *The Chair of the Examination Committee will receive the PQE II Report form through email on the day of the examination.* The PQE II Report Form must be completed by the examiners and returned to the SBS academic administrator by the Examination Committee Chair immediately following the exam. *The student has no responsibility in circulating or submitting the form.*

Dissertation Advisory Committee Nomination Form

Once students have passed their Oral Examination they may work with their advisors to form a Dissertation Advisory Committee (DAC). Selection of DAC members should be completed by the student – in consultation with their advisor, who also serves as the DAC Chair (see below), typically shortly after completion of the Oral Examination. The DAC Nomination Form is emailed to the SBS academic administrators by the student as soon as the DAC has been determined. After departmental review, the administrator will forward the Form to the PHS Program Office for final approval. Approval is typically granted within 10 days.

DAC Composition Guidelines

- In most cases, the DAC consists of the same members of the PQEII examining committee. However, in some cases changes and substitutions may be warranted depending on the direction of the research and/or faculty members' availability.
- Unless approved by the PHS Program Office, all members should be Harvard assistant, associate, or full professors, lecturers or senior lecturers or their

equivalent.

- The DAC Chair is the student's official academic advisor.
- All DAC members must be present for all scheduled DAC meetings (*remote or in-person*) unless excused due extenuating circumstances, such as a planned sabbatical, an unexpected family emergency, legally-required events, etc. In these cases, a General Petition should be submitted.

DAC Candidate Timeline, Preparation, & Procedures

- The first DAC meeting should be scheduled by the PHS candidate **within six weeks of completing the PQE II**. The first DAC meeting should take place no later than the first half of the sixth semester (i.e., the start of spring semester for a third-year PHS candidate). Subsequent DAC meetings should be scheduled by the PHS candidate every three months to assess progress, and the date of the next meeting should be noted on the completed DAC Report Form and provided to the Field of Study and the PHS Program Office.

Organization of the DAC Meetings

A typical DAC meeting lasts about two hours. The following information applies to the regular quarterly meetings:

- **Student Presentation:** The most substantial part of the meeting consists of a 30-40-minute presentation by the student of dissertation research. DAC members will typically interject with questions, and the presentation is followed by additional questioning, a discussion of progress and next steps.
- **DAC Comment & Feedback for Student:** The DAC should comment on student's progress, approach, and results. The DAC should evaluate the student's ability to think independently, including development of hypotheses, practical approaches for testing hypotheses, critical interpretation of data, understanding relevance of results in light of current thinking in the field, and judging how to effectively pursue the line of investigation. As students progress, written drafts, and ultimately, papers, will be reviewed in preparation for publication.
- **Report on Student Progress:** The PHS Faculty Director will review the Chair-submitted DAC Meeting Report, but confidential concerns of the DAC should be directly communicated if they arise.

Dissertation Defense

For all dissertation defenses students will have the choice of either a fully-remote defense via Zoom or in-person and scheduled in an on-campus room, which can also incorporate a Zoom format. The defense committee should decide whether they will all be attending in person or via Zoom.

The PHS Program Office will convene a pre-defense planning meeting for all students anticipating a defense to coach them through defense paperwork, format of the dissertation, and submission and timing deadlines for the FAS Registrar's Office. If unable to attend the group meeting, any student is welcome to request a one-on-one meeting at any time, but all PHS students are required to attend a meeting as part of the defense planning process along with the submission of their dissertation scheduling form.

Students preparing to defend their dissertation must review Harvard University requirements, outlined in the Dissertations section of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (GSAS) website. The pre-defense planning meeting will cover this information in-depth during the session.

decide the date, time, and on-campus location that is Zoom-enabled for the Defense.

Defense Scheduling Form should be completed and shared with the PHS Office with a cc: to the Field administrator for final PHS approval. The student name, title, date, time, and place of the Dissertation Defense will be created and announced via e-Mail to members of the Field and PHS community and publicized via poster throughout Harvard Chan ten days prior to the defense date. An electronic version of the announcement will also be shared with the defender ten days in advance for sharing with friends/family/colleagues.

An advance copy of the Dissertation should be sent for review to committee members and the Field administrator in advance of the defense date. The Field administrator will work with the defending student to determine the timeline for advanced copy sharing. A copy of the dissertation is not required to be sent to the PHS Program Office; the final copy will be collected by PHS post-defense.

In advance of the Dissertation Defense: DAC members should contact the Chair if they foresee any issues with preparedness for the dissertation defense; the Chair may also consult the PHS Program Office, which can consult/ receive clarification from GSAS, as needed. The PHS Program Office will reach out to the Committee Chair two days in advance of the defense with instructions for filing final post-defense paperwork, which the student does not see/ receive for official purposes.

During the Dissertation Defense: The PhD candidate will present a public seminar with members of Harvard community and candidate-invited guests – with an option for participants to attend via Zoom whenever possible.

Please note: While the Dissertation Defense is a public forum, questioning of the dissertation candidate during the proceedings is limited to members of the DAC. The public may ask questions only once/if invited, following the candidate's presentation and questioning by the Dissertation Advisory Committee is complete.

Examples of Majors and Minors

Majors:

Social & Behavioral change
Social epidemiology
Health behavior research
Social and behavioral sciences
Social & psychiatric epidemiology

Minors:

Methods in SBS
Global health
Quantitative methods
Planned social change
Reproductive health
Quantitative evaluation methods
Methods
Psychosocial factors and health
Public policy
Health Communication
Theoretical approaches to addressing health inequities
Mixed-methods research
Racial disparities
Racial and social inequities in health
Statistical methods
Health inequities in life course epidemiology
Neighborhood effects & spatial analysis
Applied statistical methods
Racial/Ethnic health disparities
Epidemiological methods

Racial, ethnic & social disparities

Social networks

Casual inference

Public health economics

Quantitative research methods

Adolescent health

Quantitative population health science methods

Gender, Aging and Policy

Quantitative methods