

## **PhD in Population Health Sciences Social and Behavioral Sciences Field of Study**

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### **Introduction**

The Social and Behavioral Sciences (SBS) field of study in the Population Health Sciences (PHS) PhD program provides a common core education addressing issues of Social and Behavioral Sciences. At the same time, students are expected to develop in-depth expertise in one of the following two main academic areas of interest within the field of study:

*Social Determinants of Health Area of Interest.* This area of interest emphasizes the analysis of the major social conditions that affect the health of populations. Research stresses socioeconomic position, social and economic inequality, discrimination, social networks and support, social capital, work conditions, and psychological states. Seminars, tutorials, and courses enable students to explore a range of the health consequences of various social factors by studying varied subgroups, at different times and places and under diverse and changing conditions. Students examine mechanisms and processes through which social factors exert their impact, and also investigate mechanisms that mediate or moderate relationships between social factors and health outcomes.

*Planned Social Change Area of Interest.* This area of interest focuses on the application of theory in the design of intervention programs, as well as on research and evaluation methodology. The area includes work on interventions using randomized clinical trial designs and quasi-experimental approaches. Attention is given to the following design steps: problem diagnosis, assessment, formative research, program design and evaluation. The social settings for interventions may be communities, workplaces, schools and colleges and health care facilities. Populations of interest include those who are underserved, marginalized and in special need. Intervention strategies include educational and literacy interventions, community organizing and development, social marketing, communication, adult-learning approaches and advocacy.

The doctoral program is designed to move students through course work and into the research phase with due speed. By the end of the first semester of study, all students in the doctoral program will have finalized their area of interest within the SBS field of study and prepared a plan of required and elective courses for first two years of coursework. A written field of study qualifying examination and an oral preliminary qualifying examination are taken subsequent to the end of the two years of course work. Students who satisfactorily complete these requirements become doctoral candidates and proceed to conduct original research and prepare and defend their dissertation.

## **Social and Behavioral Sciences Field of Study Requirements:**

The required coursework for doctoral students in Social and Behavioral Sciences field of study are divided into three categories: a) required courses for all Population Health Sciences PhD students; b) Field of Study Core course requirements c) course requirements to develop specific competencies within the chosen area of interest. The following section outlines the requirements specific to the Social and Behavioral Sciences field of study. General requirements for the Population Health Sciences PhD program are covered in the PHS Curriculum Guide.

### **Field of Study Core course requirements**

[14 total ORDINAL credits; 2 total PASS/FAIL credits]

**All Population Health Sciences PhD students in the Social and Behavioral Sciences field of Study are required to take the following field of study core courses which, along with the PHS core courses, form the basis for the content of the written field of study qualifying exam:**

- *SBS 201*, Society and Health, 2 GSAS ORDINAL credits
- *SBS 245*, Social and Behavioral Research Methods (Part 1), 4 GSAS ORDINAL credits
- *SBS 263*, Multilevel Statistical Methods: Concept & Application, 4 GSAS ORDINAL credits
- *SBS 269*, Doctoral Seminar on SBS, 1 GSAS PASS/FAIL credit\*
- *SBS 271*, Doctoral Seminar on SBS, 1 GSAS PASS/FAIL credit\*
- *SBS 500*, Developing a Research Protocol, 2 GSAS ORDINAL credits
- *SBS 507*, An Advanced Seminar in Theories of Disease Distribution & Health Inequities: History, Politics & Public Health, 2 GSAS ORDINAL credits
- *SBS 520*, Using Public Health Theories to Solve Community Health Problems, 2 GSAS ORDINAL credits

\*Note: All first year doctoral students in the SBS Field of Study must take SBS 269 and SBS 271.

## **Area of Interest Requirements**

[16 total ordinal credits]

In addition to the PHS core courses and the field of study requirements listed above, doctoral students in the SBS field of study must fulfill the requirements in their chosen area of interest.

### **Area of Interest Requirements**

All doctoral students in the SBS Field of Study must declare and complete coursework in one of two department areas of interest: *Social Determinants of Health* or *Planned Social Change*

#### **Social Determinants of Health Area of Interest Requirements**

[16 total ORDINAL credits]

- *Intermediate or Advanced Epidemiology* (must require EPI 201/201 as prerequisites) such as EPI 203 or EPI 204 [4 credits]
- *Human Biology* such as EH 205 (Human Physiology) [4 credits]
- *Sociology or policy course* [2 credits]
- *Content in chosen area of expertise* – [6 Ordinal Credits]

#### **Planned Social Change Area of Interest Requirements**

[16 total ORDINAL credits]

- *SBS 231 (Community Intervention Research Methods)* [2 Ordinal credits]
- *Social Science course* (examples include sociology, psychology, policy) [2 Ordinal credits]
- *Intermediate or Advanced Methods courses* – (Biostatistics/Statistics, Epidemiology, Ethnographic/Qualitative Research Methods, Program Evaluation or Other Research Methods)[6 Ordinal credits]
- *Content in chosen area of expertise* – [6 Ordinal Credits]

## **Electives**

Students are required to enroll in additional elective courses to fulfill the degree requirement of 2 years [64 credits] of full-time course work.

Course times and days may change from year to year. Be sure to refer to the courses and schedules sections on the Registrar's Office website for the most up-to-date information: [www.hsph.harvard.edu/registrar](http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/registrar).

Note: There are six optional concentrations available to students in the Social and Behavioral Sciences field of study: *Maternal and Child Health/Children, Youth and Families Concentration, Health Communications Concentration, Obesity Epidemiology and Prevention Interdisciplinary Concentration, Public Health Leadership Interdisciplinary Concentration, Women, Gender and Health Interdisciplinary Concentration* and *Nutrition and Global Health Concentration*. Courses in these concentrations may be taken as electives.

## Minimum Grade Requirements

All SBS Field of Study Core Requirements must be taken for ordinal grades and must be passed with a grade of B minus or above. The exceptions are of SBS 269 and SBS 271 which must be taken pass/fail.

1. A doctoral student who receives a grade below a B minus on any of the General SBS Requirements must:
2. Retake the course in the form of an independent study.
3. These independent studies have the same course credits as the original course, and both the original course and the make-up independent study will remain on the student's record.
4. The faculty member who teaches the course in the year that the student is retaking the requirement must be the instructor for the independent study and must sign the independent study form.
5. The student is required to attend all classes, complete all coursework and take all exams associated with the departmental course.
6. For a student to receive a passing grade in the make-up independent study, the student must do course work at a level of a B minus or better and the instructor must certify this in writing. **The make-up independent study does not replace the original course on the student's official academic transcript.**
7. The student may not use any make-up independent study for credit towards the total number of electives required for the doctoral degree.

### **Ordinal Credits for other SBS Requirements**

All courses in the chosen Area of Interest must be taken for ORDINAL credits). Consequently, courses taken P/F, and research study and independent study credits cannot be included in the credit requirements for the chosen Area of Interest.

## Course Plan for SBS Field of Study PhD Students

By the end of the first semester of study, you should select your area of interest and outline your course plan. Course work is generally completed within two years.

All doctoral students in the SBS field of study are expected to augment the basic requirements with substantial course work appropriate for a research orientation and in the topic of their interest.

In addition, during your final year of coursework (normally your 2<sup>nd</sup> year), ***you should meet with your advisor before the start of the spring semester to confirm that you have met or are meeting all of the degree requirements.*** Any appropriate waivers should be requested at that time.

## SBS Field of Study Written Qualifying Examinations

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 theses. 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 2<sup>nd</sup> year of doctoral work. Anyone considering an alternate time should discuss this with their advisor.

*It is expected that students will have completed all course work (a minimum of 64 credits) prior to taking the written exam.* In addition, all doctoral students are required to take human research training as one stipulation of sitting for their Qualifying Written Exam. This training must be completed before the written qualifying exam unless required earlier as per OHRA (Office of Human Research Administration) policy. To satisfy this requirement, complete Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) at <https://www.citiprogram.org/default.asp>.

Documentation in the form of a completed tracking sheet to demonstrate completion of the required coursework and human research training must be submitted before taking the exam. Exceptions may be made for one or two courses with sufficient justification. **Petitions for exceptions must be made in writing to the Department Chair when submitting the tracking sheet.** The petition must include: 1) a plan of action which includes identifying which classes will be taken subsequent to the written exam and 2) a schedule for completion of the courses to ensure you remain in compliance with the doctoral timetable.

The exam is given in late May each year. Dates and other details are provided to all students who are eligible to take the exam in November of each year.