
Policy Number: 102

Subject/Title: Doctoral Committee Structure

Effective Date: Spring 2023

Policy Statement:

Before Completing the Preliminary Examination

All DrPH and PhD students are required to complete a preliminary exam as a degree requirement. (See [Policy 307 Preliminary Examination, Admission to Candidacy and Dissertation Defense](#) for more information). Until the preliminary exam has been successfully completed, students primarily work with their faculty advisor to discuss and/or plan any future research interests. All students are assigned a faculty advisor at admission. Students may request to change their faculty advisor by completing a [Change of Advisor Request](#) form.

After Completing the Preliminary Examination

After successfully completing the preliminary exam, students can begin the research process to complete their dissertation which begins with forming a dissertation committee. The following describes DrPH and PhD committee structure requirements:

Dissertation Committee Membership Requirements

Required Membership: All dissertation committees must have at least three current UTHealth Houston School of Public Health faculty members. Faculty can fulfill multiple required roles within the committee; however, three separate faculty members are required. Required membership is as follows:

1. Faculty Advisor – The student's faculty advisor is responsible for ensuring the student is completing their academic requirements and for providing input on the student's fall and spring evaluations. (See [Policy 200 Student Evaluation](#) for more information) All students are assigned a faculty advisor at admission. Students may request to change their faculty advisor to better align with their research interests by completing a [Change of Advisor Request](#) form.
2. Dissertation Chair – The student's committee must include a dissertation chair and can only be fulfilled by a current SPH faculty member. The chair is responsible for ensuring the student is on track with their dissertation by following deadlines and committee expectations. A student's faculty advisor may also serve as the dissertation chair, if appropriate, but is not required.
3. Third member (outside the student's discipline) – Students must have a committee member that appropriately represents an area external to the student's discipline and must include a justification statement when the committee member is elected. Faculty within the same academic department may be eligible as long as another discipline area is represented.

*A single faculty member may fill more than one required role as defined above, however, three separate faculty members are required. This may require electing additional optional members, discussed below, to meet the minimum current SPH faculty requirement.

Additional Membership: Additional members serve to meaningfully contribute to the dissertation research. In most cases additional members are not required, unless noted above. Additional members may include the following:

- Dissertation Supervisor – A dissertation supervisor can be elected when the student's research is being led by a non-UTHealth Houston faculty member. The dissertation supervisor must have a terminal doctoral degree and a copy of their CV is required when the supervisor is elected. (Current SPH faculty cannot be elected as the Dissertation Supervisor.)

- Certificate representation – students who elected the Maternal & Child Health graduate certificate must include faculty representative on their committee. A list of appropriate faculty can be found on the certificate planner and verified by the certificate coordinator. Students who elect this certificate must include a focus of maternal and child health in their dissertation.
- Optional members – these members serve to provide additional expertise in support of the student's dissertation topic. Optional members may be internal or external to UTHealth Houston School of Public Health.

Additional Considerations

All committee members must be trained with a terminal degree appropriate to their role on the committee and may not be a current UTHealth Houston School of Public Health student.

External Reviewer: An external reviewer is external to the student's elected committee and serves to provide an unbiased assessment of the proposal and final dissertation. An external reviewer is not required by the Office of Academic Affairs and Student Services, however a student's committee may choose to require one.

If required by the committee, an elected committee member cannot serve as the external reviewer. External reviewers may be internal or external to UTHealth Houston, but must have a terminal degree.

Committee Changes: As the student's research progresses, changes to the committee may occur. However, following approval of the dissertation proposal, changes to the composition of the committee is discouraged. Students may submit changes to their committee by submitting a [Doctoral Committee Membership Form](#) documenting any removal or addition of members. **All committee changes must include the approval of the student's dissertation Chair and department Chair.** When a faculty member leaves the school, the student's academic department is responsible for helping the student reconstitute an appropriate committee.

Reason for Policy: The proposed committee structure was developed to facilitate faculty mentoring of students based on academic requirements and the student's research interests related to their dissertation.

Definitions:

- "UTHealth Houston School of Public Health Faculty" must be a currently appointed assistant, associate or full professor; with a primary or secondary appointment at the school.
- A full list of UTHealth Houston School of Public Health Faculty can be found on the [faculty directory](#) webpage.

Scope and Audience: All DrPH and PhD students matriculating Fall 2011 and onward.

Responsibilities and Procedures: Outlined above.

Related Policies, Forms and Information:

- [Doctoral Committee Membership Form](#)
- Additional forms and procedures found on the [mySPH Student Research](#) webpage.

History: Developed and approved in Fall 2010 to coincide with change in qualifying examination to preliminary examination and proposal and dissertation defense(s).

- Academic Council Approved: October 19, 2010
- Executive Council Approved: October 21, 2010
- Updated by Executive Council: December 2022

Responsible Office/Contact Information:

Office of Academic Affairs and Student Services
Office Phone: 713-500-9032
E-mail: SPHStudentServices@uth.tmc.edu