PhD/DrPH PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION GUIDELINES FOR DOCTORAL STUDENTS IN HEALTH PROMOTION AND BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

The PhD/DrPH Preliminary Examination in Health Promotion and Behavioral Sciences (HP/BS) has been designed to meet the standards and needs of faculty and students of the Department of Health Promotion and Behavioral Sciences and to be in accordance with The University of Texas School of Public Health (UTSPH) requirements for doctoral-level examinations. Students must be registered for at least 3 credit hours at the time the Preliminary Examination is taken unless the exam is taken during the summer. In that case, the student must be registered in the term before/after the exam is offered. In addition, they must have completed key courses in health promotion, behavioral sciences, epidemiology and biostatistics (See Eligibility). Doctoral students must successfully pass the preliminary exam to proceed in the doctoral program. It is the charge of the HP/BS Curriculum Committee to develop, administer and oversee the evaluation of this exam.

Purpose

This Preliminary Examination is a written take-home exam for students pursuing their PhD or DrPH in HP/BS. It is an evaluation tool designed to indicate to the Department whether the student can understand, synthesize, and apply the fundamental concepts and skills that are required to proceed in the doctoral program towards becoming an independent researcher. The purpose of the exam, therefore, is to evaluate the student’s command of key doctoral-level competencies specific to the design, conduct and analysis of health promotion and behavioral science studies relevant to public health. According to UTSPH policy, students who do not successfully pass this exam after two attempts will not be eligible to continue in their doctoral studies in HP/BS at UTSPH.

Eligibility

Doctoral students in HP/BS must successfully pass the preliminary exam as part of the process of becoming a doctoral candidate. To be eligible to take this exam, doctoral students must have completed and passed the following six to nine courses (approximately 18-27 hours) with a B or above. These courses are designed to be completed in one year of full-time study which includes fall, spring, and summer semesters. Below are the required courses for students who entered the program in fall 2016. For students who entered the program during a prior semester, please see the list of required courses at the end of this document.

Required (Entered Fall 2016 or later):

PHD 1122 – Health Promotion Theory and Methods: A Teaching and Learning Experience for Doctoral Students
PHD 1420 – Research Design and Analysis in Behavioral Sciences I
PHD 1421 – Research Design and Analysis in Behavioral Sciences II
PHD 1434 – Research Seminar in Health Promotion and Behavioral Sciences for Doctoral Students

Required (PhD only):
PHD 1227 – Advanced and Emerging Theories for Health Promotion

Required (DrPH only):
PHD 1123 - Health Promotion Theory and Methods II Doctoral Level
*Choose 1 of:*
PH 2610 – Fundamentals of Epidemiology
PH 2612 – Epidemiology I

*An epidemiology course taken during a master’s program will meet the eligibility requirements.*

NOTE: It is highly recommended that all students take PH 1120 or the equivalent (could be from a master's program) prior to taking the preliminary exam. If you have not had a Program Evaluation course in recent years, it is recommended that you review the PH1120 Program Evaluation textbook.

**Example Course Plan for Year 1 (Entered Fall 2016 or later):**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semester</th>
<th>Required</th>
<th>Recommended</th>
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| Fall semester Y1 | 1122 – 3 hours  
|                 | 1420 – 4 hours  
|                 | 1434 – 2 hours |                              |
| Spring semester Y1 | 1421 – 4 hours  
|                 | 1227 (PhD) or 1123 (DrPH) – 3 hours | 1227 (DrPH) or 1123 (PhD) – 3 hours |
| Summer Y1      | 2610/2612 (if needed) – 3 hours               |                              |

* Doctoral students who would like to enroll in PH 1120 may need to register for this course during the fall of their second year if they are unable to take it during the first year.

**Content and Format**

The Doctoral Preliminary Examination will be administered as a take-home exam and will test the proficiencies obtained in the required courses specified in “Eligibility”. In general terms, the exam questions are meant to test the ability to apply fundamental concepts and methods in health promotion, behavioral sciences, epidemiology and biostatistics.

The Doctoral Preliminary Examination will consist of three sections on the following topics: behavioral science/health promotion theory, research design, and data analysis. Each question will contain multiple parts. Questions may call for essays, computations based on data provided, and/or the interpretation of data. Students will be asked to write the exam in reference to one of four possible health topics. Three weeks prior to the exam, the exam coordinator will email students who are intending to take the exam to request a list of four possible health topics. The health topic can be a health behavior or a health outcome and should be supported by theoretical and empirical literature. Students can choose health topics that are similar to one another (e.g., healthy eating, physical activity) or the same health topic for different target/priority populations (e.g., condom use in adolescents, condom use in African-American women). The exam coordinator will randomly choose one of the four health topics for the students to complete the exam; the student will be notified of the chosen health topic on the day of the exam.

Guidance will be provided regarding the expected length of response for the entire exam. A total of 7 days will be given to complete the exam. The exam is open-book, open-note. Students must adhere to the UTSPH honor code [https://sph.uth.edu/content/uploads/2010/05/UTSPH-Honor-Code.pdf]. Soliciting help from or providing help to other students during the preliminary exam is not allowed.
Administration

The preliminary exam will be offered in August and at the end of the fall (during evaluation week) semester. Exam dates will be sent via email to all HP/BS doctoral students. In preparation for the preliminary exam, doctoral students must submit the preliminary exam-intent form signed by their academic advisor to the HP/BS Curriculum Committee Coordinator at least one month prior to the exam dates (i.e., in July and November) as well as a list of their grades (can be obtained from my UTH) and courses taken. If grades are not available for the courses (i.e., if the student is currently taking the course), the student should provide a signed written statement or email from the instructor indicating that the student is expected to obtain a B or higher in the course and then should submit those grades to the curriculum coordinator as soon as they are available.

Students are encouraged to meet with their academic advisor to discuss eligibility. The preliminary exam-intent form is available from the curriculum coordinator under Current Students-Student Forms on the UTSPH website [https://sph.uth.edu/current-students/student-forms/]. It will also be emailed to the HP/BS doctoral students. The doctoral student will be notified by the HP/BS Curriculum Coordinator that the preliminary exam-intent form has been received and approved. It is the responsibility of the HP/BS Curriculum Coordinator to approve the preliminary exam intent form for the student. After the HP/BS Curriculum Coordinator approves the form, it is the responsibility of the student to obtain approval from the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs. The Associate Dean will provide the final approval via email notification in a signed letter to the student. If a student is currently enrolled in a designated pre-requisite course and grades are not yet available, conditional approval to take the preliminary exam will be given.

The exam questions will be developed by the HP/BS Curriculum Committee with input from the entire HP/BS faculty. The exam will be made available on a UTSPH Blackboard site. Students will submit their completed exam on Blackboard through the “submit assignment” feature. Students should review their exams carefully prior to submission. Students must submit the exam at or prior to the end of the exam period at 11:59 pm Central Time. Late submissions will not be considered. Submission of the exam is final.

Evaluation

The exam will be graded double-blinded to both students and faculty. The evaluation of the preliminary examination will be conducted by a rotating committee composed of HP/BS Faculty. Non-tenure track faculty will not be required to serve on the grading committee but can if they choose. The number of faculty who serve on the committee will be dependent on how many students are taking the exam. It is expected that one faculty member can grade at least two exams. However, all exams will be graded by two faculty members to ensure objectivity and consistency in grading. The exam will consist of 3 sections, each worth a total of 100 points. Three exam outcomes are possible: Pass, Conditional Pass and Fail. These are described below.

Pass: Student receives a score of 80% or greater on each section.

Conditional Pass: Student receives a score of 80% or greater on two sections of the exam but receives a score below 80% on one section of the exam. The student will need to re-take the exam section that was not passed during the semester immediately following having taken the exam. If the student does not pass the section that is retaken, he/she will receive a score of Fail and will need to retake the entire exam within one year. Students cannot receive more than one Conditional Pass.

Fail: A student receives a score below 80% on two or more sections of the exam. The student should work with the academic advisor to complete a remediation plan. He/she will need to re-take the entire exam within one year.
Any student who fails the preliminary examination twice will not be allowed to continue in the doctoral program.

For a conditional pass or fail, the student will be expected to complete a remediation plan, signed by the advisor, which will outline his/her steps (e.g., independent study, course enrollment) that will be taken prior to retaking the preliminary exam. The student should work with his/her advisor and other pertinent faculty to ensure that he/she has completed their remediation plan and are ready to retake the exam.

Within four weeks of the examination, the student will be notified by email of the outcome of the examination by the HP/BS Curriculum Coordinator. The email will also be sent to the student’s Academic Advisor, Department Director, and Regional Dean (if located at Regional Campus). The email will include a summary of key components that were missed on the exam. The Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs and Student Affairs will also be notified of the student’s outcome.

**Post-Preliminary Exam**

Upon successful completion of the preliminary exam, the student will constitute a dissertation committee composed of: his/her advisor, who serves as the committee chair but may or may not be the dissertation supervisor, and two other members representing the breadth and minor areas of interest. The committee will help develop a curriculum that supports the student’s research and career goals and the student should enroll in courses to fulfill their remaining credit hours (48 semester credit hours is needed to graduate with a doctoral degree). This committee can be changed as the student’s research interests become more focused. The dissertation committee will also be responsible for evaluating the oral defense of the dissertation research proposal and the oral defense of the completed dissertation.

*Course Requirements for Students who entered prior to fall 2016*

**Required (Entered Fall 2011):**

Choose 1 of:
PHD 1227 – Advanced and Emerging Theories for Health Promotion
PHD 1122 – Health Promotion Theory and Methods: A Teaching and Learning Experience for Doctoral Students
PHD 1123 - Health Promotion Theory and Methods II Doctoral Level

Choose 1 of:
PHD 1113 – Advanced Methods for Planning and Implementing Health Promotion Programs (Intervention Mapping)
PHD 1121 – Advanced Program Evaluation

Required:
1420 – Research Design and Analysis in Behavioral Sciences I

Choose 1 of:
PH 1700 – Intermediate Biostatistics
PHD 1421 – Research Design and Analysis in Behavioral Sciences II
Approved at HP/BS Division Faculty Meeting 1-12-12; 8-7-13
Updated 8-22-16

*Choose 1 of:
PH 2610 – Fundamentals of Epidemiology
PH 2612 – Epidemiology I

Required:
PHD 1434 – Research Seminar in Health Promotion and Behavioral Sciences for Doctoral Students

Required (Entered Fall 2012-2015):
PHD 1113 – Advanced Methods for Planning and Implementing Health Promotion Programs (Intervention Mapping)
PHD 1122 – Health Promotion Theory and Methods: A Teaching and Learning Experience for Doctoral Students
PHD 1420 – Research Design and Analysis in Behavioral Sciences I
PHD 1421 – Research Design and Analysis in Behavioral Sciences II
PHD 1434 – Research Seminar in Health Promotion and Behavioral Sciences for Doctoral Students

Required (PhD only):
PHD 1227 – Advanced and Emerging Theories for Health Promotion

Required (DrPH only):
PHD 1123 - Health Promotion Theory and Methods II Doctoral Level

*Choose 1 of:
PH 2610 – Fundamentals of Epidemiology
PH 2612 – Epidemiology I

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