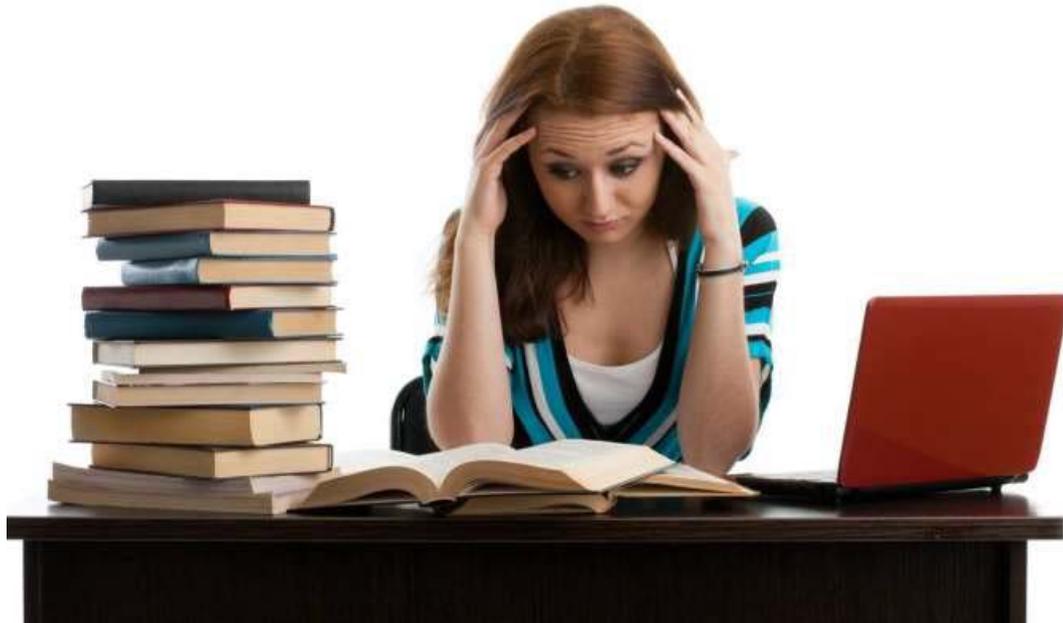# Student Guide to the DrPH/PhD Dissertation
The University of Texas School of Public Health at Houston
2017-2018

CONTENTS

I. WHAT ARE THE DISSERTATION REQUIREMENTS?

Students in the Doctor of Philosophy and the Doctor of Public Health programs are required to complete a written research dissertation that makes a substantial contribution to knowledge in the public health sciences. This guide provides an overview of the steps required to complete the dissertation.

II. WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE DISSERTATION COMMITTEE?

The dissertation committee includes the student and his/her advisors.
Upon successful completion of the preliminary exam, doctoral students form a dissertation committee composed of a dissertation advisor (who may or may not be the academic advisor) and two other members representing the student's breadth and minor areas of interest. Students who have elected to pursue a concentration must also include a representative from that concentration on their committee. The members representing the breadth and minor areas must be from different departments. Additional committee members, who bring specific expertise to the committee, are optional.

Additional details about the dissertation committee composition can be found at:
https://sph.uth.tmc.edu/academics/degree-programs/.

Students should also check their Departmental website for information specific to their degree program. Forms for adding or changing committee membership can be found at:
https://sph.uth.tmc.edu/current-students/student-forms/

What is the student's role on the committee?
As a member of the committee, the student should coordinate committee meetings. Although students are required to meet with their committees at the end of the Fall and Spring semesters, these meetings are generally insufficient for discussing the details of the dissertation. Consequently, additional meetings, specifically for review and discussion of the dissertation, are generally required. Such meetings can save the student and other committee members time, and minimize the potential for confusion that can occur when the student must try to integrate multiple (and sometimes conflicting) opinions without the benefit of everyone talking together. The number and duration of such meetings will depend on the specific project and committee. In general, it may be helpful to have meetings:

- Prior to writing the proposal

- After all committee members have a read a final, or near-final, version of the proposal

- After all committee members have read a final, or near-final, version of the dissertation

Committee meetings are typically scheduled several weeks in advance to accommodate the committee members other professional obligations.

The student should also coordinate meetings with individual committee members as needed. In general, the student should meet with a key committee member (e.g. dissertation supervisor) as often as every week. The frequency of meetings with other committee members will depend on their roles on the project.

What are the roles of the other committee members?
The committee members serve many different roles including: scientific advisor, editor, mentor and advocate. Individual members may serve in one or more of these roles. The committee or individual members of the committee work with the student to develop the proposal, obtain necessary institutional approvals (e.g. IRB, animal welfare), and assist with the execution of the proposed project and completion of the final dissertation document. In general, committee members should provide feedback on all written documents and requests within two weeks of submission by the student.

The faculty and other professional members of the committee are responsible for the approval of the scientific integrity of both the dissertation proposal and the final dissertation.

III. WHAT STEPS ARE INVOLVED?

The dissertation requires several steps:

1. Identification of a project

2. Preparation of a proposal

3. Review of proposal by the Dissertation Committee

4. Public defense of dissertation proposal*

5. Revise proposal if necessary, and obtain Dissertation Committee approval on proposal

6. Review and approval of proposal by UTHealth IRB (if applicable), and other IRB(s), etc. as needed

7. Review and approval of proposal by Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs and Student Services

8. Completion of the proposed work

9. Preparation of the final dissertation document

10. Public defense of dissertation

   *An oral defense of the proposal is required for students entering in Fall 2011 and later, and for those students entering before Fall 2011 who elect to take their Department preliminary examination rather than the individual qualifying exam. Proposal Defense Form IV can be found at: https://sph.uth.edu/current-students/student-forms/. Click on DrPH or PhD tab, depending on your program.

Each of these steps is described in this Guide. However, even before you have selected your project, it is important to ensure that you have, or have a plan to acquire, the writing skills required to complete the WCE, including basic writing skills and more advanced scientific writing skills:

Basic writing skills: The UTSPH provides a course for developing writing skills: https://sph.uth.edu/faculty/instructional-development/writing-resources/. The UTSPH also provides resources and services to help students in all disciplines become more proficient communicators through the SPH Writing Support Services.

SPH Writing Support Services provides free writing instruction for all students at all stages of the writing process. An ESL training specialist and an Academic Writing training specialist are available for in-person and online writing consultations. During each writing consultation, the training specialist will work with you to meet your and your instructor's goals for a particular writing assignment. SPH Writing Support Services will assist you in many areas of writing to help you take responsibility for your own writing.

SPH Writing Support Services is located in the SPH Library (RAS E-125) in the Houston campus, but it is available to students at all SPH campuses via interactive television (ITV). To schedule an in-person appointment or an ITV session with SPH Writing Support Services, please call 713-500-9121 or e-mail SPHWritingHub@uth.tmc.edu.

In addition to the educational resources provided by UTSPH Writing Support Services, in-person and online English as a Second Language (ESL) courses are available through several local institutions, including:

- Austin: Austin Community College: http://www.austincc.edu/
- Brownsville: UT Brownsville: http://utb.edu
- Dallas: Dallas Community Colleges: http://www.dcccd.edu
- El Paso: El Paso Community College: http://www.epcc.edu
- Houston: Houston Community College: http://www.hccs.edu/
- Houston: Rice University: http://esl.rice.edu/
- Houston: University of Houston: http://www.uhd.edu/admissions/transient.html
- San Antonio: Alamo Colleges: http://www.alamo.edu/

Scientific writing skills: Following are recommended resources to help students develop their scientific writing skills:

Textbooks

Academic Writing for Graduate Students: Essential Tasks and Skills, 3rd ed. John M. Swales and Christine B. Feak (The University of Michigan Press, 2012)

The Bedford Handbook, 8th ed. Diane Hacker and Nancy Sommers (Bedford/St. Martin's Press, 2009)

The Craft of Scientific Writing, 3rd ed. Michael Alley (Springer, 1996)

Essentials of Writing Biomedical Research Papers, 2nd ed. Mimi Zeiger (McGraw Hill, 2000)

Style: The Basics of Clarity and Grace, 5th ed. Joseph M. Williams & Joseph Bizup (Pearson Education, Inc., 2015). ISBN-13: 978-0321953308

They Say / I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing, 3rd ed. Gerald Graff, Cathy Birkenstein and Russel Durst (W. W. Norton & Co., 2014)

Writing Science: How to Write Papers that Get Cited and Proposals that Get Funded. Joshua Schimel (Oxford University Press, 2011)

Online writing resources
- The Writing Center at the University of North Carolina: http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/
- Purdue University Online Writing Laboratory (OWL): http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/
- Duke University Writing Studio: http://twp.duke.edu/twp-writing-studio
- The Science of Scientific Writing (Gopen and Swan): http://www.americanscientist.org/issues/pub/the-science-of-scientific-writing/
- Scientific Writing: Beyond Tips and Tricks (Swan): http://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=swan+writing+youtube&FORM=VIRE2#view=detail&mid=AB82E17FFC0E6721618BAB82E17FFC0E6721618B
- Three Modules on Clear Writing Style: An Introduction to The Craft of Argument, by Joseph M. Williams and Gregory Colomb: http://cnx.org/contents/K7sPEHSM@1.2:YLds-vB0@1/Writing-Module-Introductory-No

Use of electronic and library resources: The UTSPH Library provides formal training on the use of online searching techniques and reference management software. In addition, members of the library staff are available to provide one-on-one training and assistance.

https://sph.uth.edu/current-students/library/

The Texas Medical Center library also offers classes on a variety of topics: https://library.tmc.edu/resources/   (Click on "Classes/Workshops" in the top right tab)

III-A. Identification of a Project

It is never too early to start thinking about topics for your dissertation. There are many potential sources of ideas, including: faculty, staff and students; co-workers and other colleagues; journals; classes; seminars; and professional meetings. Projects that are largely complete or that have been completed prior to writing your proposal, including work that has been submitted for publication or previously published, may not be used for your dissertation.

As you begin to think about your dissertation topic, it may help to keep a notebook or journal that includes project ideas, notes from discussions and seminars, lists of additional people to talk with, and articles on topics of interest. Once you have identified a potential project, it may be helpful to prepare a short overview, summarizing the relevant background information as well as the aims and significance of the proposed project, which can be shared and discussed with your committee members.

The School's website offers several features that can help you to find out about the research interests of the faculty.

The online faculty directory includes brief descriptions of each faculty member's research interests. The directory can be filtered by Department, Campus or Center and can also be searched for specific keywords:

https://sph.uth.tmc.edu/faculty/

The Office of Research webpage includes lists of recent publications by the faculty as well as recently funded grants:

https://sph.uth.tmc.edu/research/office-of-research/

The project that you select should be of interest to you and relevant to your future career goals. However, it should also be feasible to carry-out given available resources and within a reasonable time period. It is very important that you pick a project that fits with your skills (e.g. statistical, qualitative and analytic). Consequently, once you have identified a potential project, it is essential that you discuss both the scientific and practical aspects of the project with your committee members and any others who would play a significant role in the project. Do not be discouraged if your first project idea is determined to be inappropriate, for either scientific or practical reasons. It is not unusual to identify two or three potential projects before an appropriate project is identified. Working through the scientific and practical issues of each potential project provides valuable experience and perspective and is part of the learning process.

When should the dissertation project be started? Although it is never too early to start thinking about ideas for your dissertation project, planning the project and writing the proposal will require the synthesis of knowledge and experiences gained in the classroom. Consequently, the bulk of the dissertation project is undertaken after sufficient public health knowledge and skills have been acquired and the student has passed the preliminary exam.

TIMELINE: The time required to identify a dissertation project is extremely variable. However,

it can take several months to identify a suitable project.

III-B. Preparation of the Proposal

Once you and your committee have agreed on an appropriate project, the next step is to complete a written project proposal.

What is the purpose of the proposal?

The proposal is a requirement for all doctoral students and serves several purposes.   First, the proposal prepares you for the work that will be required to complete your dissertation project. As you write your proposal, you are gaining important background knowledge that will help to guide your project, as well as working through the logistics required to complete each step of the project. The proposal also serves as a contract between you and your committee. It is a statement of the goals that you have agreed need to be met to complete the dissertation and move forward towards graduation. Your proposal may also be required to obtain the institutional approvals (e.g. IRB) needed before the project may be initiated.

Is there a specific format for the proposal?

Templates are available for preparing and formatting the final dissertation, and these templates can also be used to prepare the proposal, if desired. UTSPH does not require a specific format (margins, font, etc.) for the proposal, however. In general, double-spaced text with 12-point font and 1-inch margins is appropriate for the proposal. Page numbers are also recommended. The templates provide formatting style guidance (margins, font, heading style, etc.). Templates are available on the "Templates" tab at: https://sph.uth.edu/research/student-research/#tab-4. Please check with your dissertation committee to determine their preference of style for the references and/or bibliography (e.g., APA style).

What should the proposal include?

The length and specific content of your proposal will be determined by your committee. There is no minimum or maximum page requirement for proposals; however, in general, dissertation proposals are typically not more than 25 double-spaced pages (1 inch margins, 12 point font) and include the following sections:

Background/Introduction and Public Health Significance

This section should provide a review of the relevant literature. The level of detail that you provide in this section will be determined by you and your committee members. At a minimum, you should provide the background information that a general reader would require to understand the topic of your project and the rationale for the proposed work. This section should also include a discussion of the public health significance of your specific project.

Specific Aims/Hypotheses/Objectives

This section should include a statement of the research question, hypothesis, specific aims or objectives of your project. The best approach for setting up this section will depend on your specific project and should be discussed with your committee. This section may also include a brief discussion of the rationale for the proposed project and/or a brief description of the approach that will be used to meet the stated goals.

Methods

The content of this section will vary depending on your specific project. However, all proposals must include details of the methods that will be used to address the study aims/hypotheses or objectives. The methods section should include the following considerations, as appropriate to your proposed work:

- o Study design
- o Study setting, including locations and dates
- o Study population
    - Inclusion and exclusion criteria
    - Recruitment strategy
    - Consent process (who, what, when, where, how?)
    - Sample size calculations and/or study power
- o Data collection procedures
    - Specify the type of data that will be collected, as well as how the data will be collected (e.g. interviews, review of medical records) and recorded (e.g. paper records, computer program, videotape)
    - For research involving interaction with human participants, include a full protocol/description of study procedures, such as the number of study visits required of participants, what procedures will occur at each visit, how long each visit will take, and the total amount of time required of each subject to participate in the project. This information will be required by the Institutional Review Board that reviews Human Subjects research.
- o Data Handling and Record Keeping
    - State how you will access data/source documents (e.g. electronic medical record, chart review)
    - State whether human subjects will be identifiable either directly (e.g. name) or through identifying variables (e.g. medical record number).
    - State how and where the data will be stored, and how it will be protected to maintain confidentiality.
- o Data analysis
    - Include statistical, laboratory and/or other methods that you will use to address each study aim, hypothesis or objective.
- o Ethical considerations
    - Include human subjects, animal subjects, and/or other safety considerations.

The methods section tells the reader exactly "how" you are going to achieve your aims and/or answer your research questions. It is important to be as specific as possible in this section. For example, stating that you will use logistic regression to analyze your data is not sufficient. Rather, you need to state what independent and dependent variables will be used as well as what potential confounders and effect modifiers will be considered. Additional details, such as how variables will be coded, can also be helpful. Further, you should indicate how the analyses will be interpreted (e.g. p-values, odds ratios and 95% confidence intervals).

When organizing the methods section, it is often helpful to re-state each aim and follow it with the details of the specific methods that will be used to achieve that aim. It is also that

you use past and present tense appropriately in this section. For example, if you will analyze previously collected data, sections on study design, setting and subject recruitment should be written in the past tense (e.g. someone collected the data in the past), whereas sections on data analysis should be written in the future tense (e.g. you will analyze the data in the future, after your proposal is approved). It is extremely important that you clearly delineate the work that you will do from the work that has already been done.

References/Bibliography

This section should include complete references for all literature, websites, books, and other materials referenced in your proposal. There is no required format for the references in your proposal. It is, however, recommended that you use reference management software such as RefWorks, which is available free of charge to UTSPH students.

Information and training on RefWorks is available through the UTSPH library at:
http://libguides.sph.uth.tmc.edu/guides-handouts-library-resources/refworks-handouts

Other Sections

Your proposal may include other sections as appropriate to your project or as required by your committee. Examples of other sections that you might include are:

- o *Preliminary data:* Projects that are largely complete or that have been completed prior to writing your proposal, including work that has been submitted for publication or previously published, may not be used for your dissertation. However, if you have done work in preparation for writing your proposal, for example as part of your practicum or as a graduate research assistant, you should include a summary of the work that has already been done, in past tense.
- o *Results:* If you include this section, it should provide an outline of how your results will be presented and mock-ups of the tables and/or figures that will be used to present your data.

Preparation of your proposal is an interactive process that involves your committee members. As you begin your proposal, you should work with your committee members to establish how they will review drafts of your proposal. Often, one member of your committee will serve as a primary reviewer for your initial draft(s), while the other members will review only later drafts or specific sections of the proposal.

In general, your proposal will require several drafts and edits before it is finalized. It is reasonable to assume that, on average, it will take two weeks for committee members to provide feedback on each of your drafts and that two to four drafts will be required before the proposal is finalized.

III-C. Oral defense of the dissertation proposal

Specific requirements for the oral defense of the dissertation research proposal are set by the Office of Academic Affairs and Student Services and each doctoral program. Upon completion of the dissertation proposal, when the dissertation committee is ready to formally approve the proposal, students will make an open oral presentation of the research proposal followed by questions from a proposal defense examination committee. The proposal defense examination committee will consist of the student's dissertation committee plus at least one additional reviewer (but no more than two additional reviewers), who are chosen by the dissertation committee. Additional reviewers may be faculty members from within or outside of UTSPH. These additional reviewers will provide more unbiased assessment of the proposal.

During the proposal defense examination, questions may be directed at the proposed research as well as contextual questions relating to the field of public health. The defense will be assessed pass/fail. Students will have two opportunities to pass. Passing will be by consensus. If consensus is not reached, passing may be by majority if all non-committee members approve passing. After the defense is complete, the dissertation defense committee and the department chair will then need to sign the student's Proposal Defense form for forwarding to the Office of Student Affairs. Doctoral Dissertation Proposal Defense Form IV can be downloaded from:

- https://sph.uth.edu/current-students/student-forms/ (Click on DrPH or PhD tab, depending on your program)

Defense presentation Format: Although there no specific format for this presentation, it is suggested that you use a standard software package (e.g. PowerPoint) to develop your talk. You should provide drafts of your slides to your dissertation committee, and practice your talk at least once with your committee members. Additional practice sessions with other students or colleagues can also be helpful. You should be able to present your work without, or with minimal reference, to written notes. It is also important that you are able to go through your entire presentation in the allotted time.

Setting up the proposal defense: The student's advisory committee in communication with the student's departmental faculty will decide on the most appropriate time and venue for this activity. Houston campus students can schedule a room for the proposal defense by completing and submitting a Room reservation form to Betty Claybon, RAS W130, or by submitting a room reservation request through the Astra online reservation system. Austin, Brownsville, Dallas, El Paso, and San Antonio Campus students should contact their campus Staff Advisor to schedule a room. Presentations should be announced to the public, for example: distribute multiple flyers, or announce the defense in the SPH weekly newsletter by forwarding information to: sphannounce@uth.tmc.edu

III-D. Approval of the dissertation proposal

What approvals are needed?

Once you have passed your proposal defense, your committee members must approve and sign off on your written proposal. In addition, you must obtain approval for your proposal from the UTSPH Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs and Student Services. Some proposals may also need to be submitted to, and approved by:

- UTHealth Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (CPHS, which is our IRB)

- Other IRB(s) (e.g., for data collection at an institution outside of UTHealth)

- UTHealth Animal Welfare Committee (AWC)

- UTHealth Biosafety, Chemical Safety, or Radiation Safety Committees

To determine whether your project requires such approvals, as well as for additional information on the approval process, please refer to the UTSPH Research Compliance Guide, which is included below in the Appendix to this Guide, and is available on the SPH website:

https://sph.uth.edu/research/student-research/#tab-2

When should I submit the proposal?

After your Proposal Defense has been completed and passed, and after your dissertation committee has signed off on the written proposal, you may then submit the proposal concurrently to CPHS for approval (if you are using human subjects or human-derived data), and to the Office of Academic Affairs and Student Services for approval of the Assistant Dean.

Proposal deadlines It is required by school policy that all UTHealth SPH students completing a WCE, thesis or dissertation must submit a PROPOSAL for review and approval no later than the last day of class of the term *prior* to which they expect to graduate. Students must also adhere to University IRB and Research policies and guidelines, as well as POLICY 401 CONTINUOUS ENROLLMENT once their thesis/dissertation proposal is approved. Dual degree students may be enrolled in either program to work on their research. More information on school policies can be found at: https://sph.uth.edu/academics/academic-affairs/#tab-3

Specific semester dates and deadlines for the proposal submission and approval, along with other dates pertaining to the CE/thesis, are posted on the Student Research "Important Dates" page at: https://sph.uth.edu/research/student-research/important-dates-for-the-cethesisdissertation/

Students should also refer to the SPH Graduation page for information about other graduation-related deadlines: https://sph.uth.edu/current-students/graduation/

Submitting your proposal to the school and IRB for approval

Students must submit a printed proposal along with signed forms/documents to the Office of Academic Affairs and Student Services for approval, as well as an electronic copy of the proposal itself (without the forms). Proposals are submitted to CPHS via the iRIS online system for UTHealth IRB approval. Detailed submission instructions and proposal forms are available on the "Submitting your Proposal" tab at: https://sph.uth.edu/research/student-

All dissertation proposals will require the following forms/documentation:

- Student Proposal Cover Sheet
- Institutional Approvals Document
- Authorship, Publication Plan, and Data Ownership form
- Certificate of student's completion of a course on the protection of human subjects through the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI):
  - https://www.citiprogram.org/

Additional forms or documentation may be required (as applicable), such as:

- Data Handling Procedures (for use of *existing* data/samples)
- Letter of permission for use of data (for use of existing data not in the public domain)
- Letter documenting that the student has been added as personnel on an existing UTHealth faculty member's study, which has been approved through U T Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (CPHS)
- UT CPHS letter of approval (or exemption letter) for the student's CE/Thesis/Dissertation research (student is PI). Students who require CPHS approval for their project should review the CPHS protocol requirements to ensure that they include all relevant detail in their SPH proposal.
- UTHealth Animal Welfare Committee documentation (projects using animals)
- UTHealth Institutional Biosafety/Chemical Safety Committees (as appropriate)
- Certificate(s) of completion from appropriate institutional safety courses (e.g. animals; biohazardous substances, chemical, radioactive materials; microbiological, biological, infectious agents or recombinant DNA)

Approval by the Assistant Dean requires that all appropriate forms/documents have been submitted and are complete and accurate. If your project requires CPHS or other approvals, and such approvals are pending, you may submit all other documents to the Assistant Dean for review. However, final approval by the Assistant Dean will not be issued until after all pending approvals and documentation have been received.

What are the enrollment requirements?

You must be enrolled for at least three credit hours during the semester in which the proposal is submitted and in every semester after you submit your proposal until you graduate.

TIMELINE: Completion of the dissertation proposal will generally take at least one month and may require several months, depending on the number of revisions required by your advisory committee. Projects that require CPHS or other institutional approvals will generally take longer than those that do not require such approvals.

III-E. Completion of the proposed project

The requirements for this step vary considerably from project to project. While the dissertation proposal provides an outline of the work that needs to be accomplished, the student and committee members must work together to determine the details of how and when that work will be accomplished.

The successful and timely completion of any project requires communication, organization and time management. Hence, it is essential that you meet with your committee members to develop a work plan and timeline. Issues that should be addressed during this meeting include:

- the role of each committee member
  - often, you will work more closely with one member than the others
- meeting schedules
  - how often will you meet with the entire committee? individual members?
  - optimally, you will meet at least every other week with a least one member of the committee
- mechanism(s) for providing updates between meetings
  - e.g. emails, summary reports etc.

As you are working on your project, it is important to adjust your work plan and timeline so that they remain realistic. If your work plan changes substantially, relative to what was included in your approved proposal, it may be necessary to submit a proposal amendment memo for review by the ADR as well as protocol amendments to other relevant committees (e.g. CPHS).

TIMELINE: In general, it will take 1-3 years to complete a doctoral dissertation after all appropriate approvals have been received.

III-F. Preparation of the final dissertation

The dissertation proposal will provide the starting point for your final dissertation document. However, you may need to update the Background section to reflect any new developments in the field. In addition, you may need to expand and/or revise the Methods section to accurately reflect the procedures that were used. You will also need to write the sections that were not included in your proposal (e.g. Results and Discussion) and update your references.

Is there a specific format for the final dissertation?

The final dissertation document can have one of two general formats:

o   Dissertation without journal article
o   Dissertation with journal article(s)

Templates and a Template Checklist to be used for formatting are available on the "Templates" tab at: https://sph.uth.edu/research/student-research/#tab-4

The templates are designed to assure that standards of style and document formatting (margins, page numbering, style, etc.) are followed. They are not intended to define the specific content of the dissertation. Use of the templates is optional for the proposal; however, they must be consulted for the appropriate formatting of the final dissertation document.

What should the final dissertation document include?

There is considerable flexibility in the manner in which you present your dissertation. In general, the final document will include the following sections:

- **Abstract**

  The abstract is a concise summary (~350 words) of the background, methods, primary results and conclusions of your dissertation.

- **Background/Introduction and Public Health Significance** (previously described)

- **Specific Aims/Hypotheses/Objectives** (previously described)

- **Methods** (previously described)

- **Results**

  This section should describe your findings or accomplishments, without comment or discussion. Findings may be presented in tables and figures as well as text.
  If the project has been, or will be submitted for publication, the journal article (conforming to the style of the journal to which it has been/will be submitted) may be included as a chapter within the results section. Any additional findings, not included in the article, should be included as a separate chapter in the results section.

- **Discussion/Conclusions/Recommendations**

  In this section, the results of your project should be discussed relative to what is already known about the topic. In addition, the conclusions and/or recommendations that can be made based on the results of the project should be stated. Finally, the strengths and limitations of the project should be described.

References/Bibliography (previously described)

What institutional approvals are required for the final dissertation?

In addition to approval by all committee members, the format of the final dissertation must be reviewed by the Office of Academic Affairs and Student Services to ensure that it conforms to all structural requirements (margins, page numbering, font, etc.). One or two revisions are often required before the dissertation format is approved. In general, format reviews are returned to the student within one week.

TIMELINE: The final signed dissertation, final defense, and an electronic upload of the dissertation to ProQuest EDT must be completed and submitted to the Office of Academic Affairs and Student Services by the deadlines indicated on the SPH calendar in the semester you intend to graduate. Students should refer to the SPH Graduation webpage for information submitting the final dissertation: https://sph.uth.edu/current-students/graduation/

As with all of the steps in the dissertation, the time required to complete the final written document can be quite variable.

II-G. Dissertation Defense

Students will make a formal public (with advertisement to the UTSPH community at least two weeks prior to the defense date) presentation and defense of the completed dissertation research. Questions will be directed at the research topic. The dissertation defense committee will be composed of the student's dissertation committee and one or two external reviewers selected by the dissertation advisor. The defense will be assessed pass/fail. Students will have two opportunities to pass. Passing will be by consensus. If consensus is not reached, passing may be by majority if all external reviewers approve passing.

Although there is not a specific format for this presentation, it is suggested that you use a standard software package (e.g. PowerPoint) to develop your talk. You should provide drafts of your slides to your dissertation committee, and practice your talk at least once with your committee members. Additional practice sessions with other students or colleagues can also be helpful. You should be able to present your work without, or with minimal reference, to written notes and be prepared to answer questions from the audience. It is also important that you are able to go through your entire presentation in the allotted time.

Setting up the dissertation defense: The student's advisory committee in communication with the student's Departmental faculty will decide on the most appropriate time and venue for this activity. Students can schedule a room for the proposal defense by completing and submitting a room

reservation form to Betty Claybon, RAS W130, or by submitting a room reservation request through the Astra online reservation system. Austin, Brownsville, Dallas, El Paso, and San Antonio Campus students should contact their campus Staff Advisor to schedule a room. Presentations should be announced to the public, for example: distribute multiple flyers, or announce the defense in the SPH weekly newsletter by forwarding information to: sphannounce@uth.tmc.edu

More information about setting up the final defense can be found on the "Planning to Graduate" page at: https://sph.uth.edu/current-students/planning-to-graduate/#tab-4

IV. What is the General Timeline for Completion of the Dissertation?

There is no set time for the completion of the dissertation. The amount of time required to complete the dissertation is determined by the specific project and the time that the student devotes to the project. In general, this process will require at least one and up to 4 years.

Activity	Timeline
Selection of a project 　　Discussion of ideas with committee members 　　Approval of concept by all committee members	Up to a year
Preparation/oral defense/committee approval of the proposal 　　Draft proposal 　　Review of proposal by committee members 　　Revision of proposal (several revisions may be necessary) 　　Oral defense 　　Committee approval	3-6 months
Other institutional approvals of proposal (if required)	2-6 weeks[*]
ADR approval of proposal	2 weeks
Conduct of the project 　　Data collection 　　Data management 　　Analysis	1-3 years
Preparation/committee approval of the final dissertation document 　　Update background, methods, bibliography as needed 　　Write results and discussion 　　Prepare figures and tables 　　Submit to committee members 　　Review by committee members 　　Revisions as necessary (several may be required) 　　Committee approval	3-6 months
Formatting review of final dissertation document	$\leq$ 1 month
Total	1-4 years

*Proposals requiring full IRB review may take longer.

APPENDIX

RESEARCH COMPLIANCE
The University of Texas School of Public Health at Houston
2016-2017

All research conducted by the faculty, students and staff of UTSPH including research projects and analyses of research data that are conducted as part of UTSPH courses, must be reviewed and approved or exempted by the appropriate Institutional committees *before* the research is initiated. At the University of Texas Health Science Center (UTHealth), these committees, which fall under the UTHealth Office of Research, monitor research compliance related to: Human Subjects Protection, Care and Use of Animals, and Environmental Health and Safety.

UTHealth Office of Research: http://www.uthouston.edu/research/

UTHealth Compliance Program: http://www.uthouston.edu/compliance/

It is the responsibility of the investigator (or course instructor) to ensure that a research project has received all necessary approvals prior to initiating a study, and to require all project staff and/or students to receive appropriate training before initiating any research related activities. It is also the investigator's responsibility to obtain approval for any additions or changes to the study, before they are implemented, as well as to maintain all necessary approvals through completion of the study.

This document provides UTSPH investigators with general information regarding the Institutional training that is available, and the oversight that is required for different types of research. In addition, general questions regarding training and oversight may be directed to Brooke Burns in the UTSPH Office of Academic Affairs and Student Services. However, investigators should visit the appropriate UTHealth website for the most up-to-date and complete information, and/or contact the appropriate programmatic official in the UTHealth Office of Research, to ensure that they have obtained all necessary training and approvals before initiating any research project.

Brooke Burns: 713-500-9072 or Brooke.Burns@uth.tmc.edu

Student Research: The information included in this document relates to students as well as faculty and staff. Additional information related specifically to student research is provided at the end of the document.

Human Subjects Protection

Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (CPHS)

CPHS is the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for UTHealth. CPHS reviews proposed research as it applies to the individuals being asked to participate as research subjects in order to determine if adequate measures are in place to protect autonomy, safety, emotional health, and financial considerations.

Human subjects research is defined as research involving human subjects, human-derived materials, or human-derived data. All human subjects research, funded and unfunded, must be reviewed and approved by CPHS before it is initiated if it falls in one of the following categories:

1. Human subjects research conducted by any UTHealth employee (faculty, staff, administrative and professional), student, or resident in any facility/location (e.g. MHHS**,** HCPC, Thomas Street Clinic or LBJ General Hospital);

2. Human subjects research conducted by non-UTHealth investigators that involves subjects/patients from any UTHealth-facility.

CPHS: http://www.uthouston.edu/cphs/

Most of the research conducted by UTSPH investigators will require review by CPHS. Examples of research that **does not** require CPHS review include:

> ***Research Using Simulated Data:*** Research based solely on data obtained through computer simulations does not require CPHS review.

> ***Research Using Published Literature:*** Research that is based entirely on published literature (e.g. systematic literature reviews) does not require CPHS review.

Exempt Status: Many research projects are exempt from CPHS review. However, the investigator **cannot** make the decision regarding exempt status**.** Studies that may be exempt must be submitted for review and determination of exempt status by CPHS. Examples of types of research that may qualify for exemption include:

> ***Research Using Publicly Available Data:*** Research involving publicly available data (e.g. census data, labor statistics, data available online) must be submitted to CPHS in iRIS for determination of Exemption. Investigators should contact the CPHS at 713-500-7943 if they are not sure whether their data qualifies as "publicly available."

> ***Research Using Existing, De-identified Data:*** Research involving the use of existing, de-identified data sets must submit an application to CPHS in iRIS for determination of Exemption.

Expedited Review: Research involving existing data sets with the use of personal identifiers must be submitted for review by CPHS in iRIS. These studies may qualify for Expedited Review by CPHS.

Information on Exempt/Expedited Review: http://www.uthouston.edu/cphs/policies/index.htm

Human Subjects training: All individuals participating in research that involves human subjects must receive appropriate training before initiating any research activities, and must receive updated training as necessary.

Courses that satisfy the UTHealth requirement for education on the protection of human subjects are offered online by the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI).

Information about CITI: http://www.uthouston.edu/cphs/for-researchers/training.htm

Link to CITI: https://www.citiprogram.org/default.asp?language=english

In addition to the above requirement, all principal investigators of sponsored projects must complete an online Investigator Briefing in the Responsible Conduct of Research. Further details on this requirement can be found at: http://www.uthouston.edu/evpara/investigator-briefing.htm

Applications: UT CPHS uses an online application called iRIS (Integrated Research Information System). All applications, including those for studies that may be exempt from CPHS review, must be submitted through iRIS.

Register for iRIS training: http://www.uthouston.edu/cphs/for-researchers/reg-iris-training.htm
Basic iRIS instructions: http://www.uthouston.edu/cphs/for-researchers/basic-iris.htm
Log in to iRIS: https://iris.uth.tmc.edu/

Care and Use of Animals

Center for Laboratory Animal Medicine and Care (CLAMC)

The CLAMC provides training related to the oversight, care and use of experimental animals, to ensure that the individuals involved in these activities are qualified to accomplish these tasks in a humane and scientifically acceptable manner.

CLAMC: https://www.uth.edu/animal-research/

Animal Welfare Committee (AWC)

All research using animal subjects or animal derived materials must be submitted to the AWC, the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee, for the UTHealth. Faculty with approved animal use protocols must assure the AWC that personnel will be or are adequately trained. Training is provided through CLAMC.

AWC: https://www.uth.edu/animal-research/awc.htm

Environmental Health and Safety

Safety, Health, Environment and Risk Management (SHERM)

Training in basic laboratory safety as well as radiation, chemical and biosafety is provided by SHERM.

SHERM: http://www.uth.edu/safety/

Radiation Safety Committee

This Committee formulates and recommends policy for the use of radioactive materials and other sources of radiation. Research involving use of radioactive materials in humans must be reviewed by the Radiation Safety Committee.

Chemical Safety Committee

This Committee recommends policy for the use of chemicals that may be hazardous in the research, clinical and educational activities at UTHealth. Chemical Safety Committee approval must be obtained prior to using acutely toxic chemical agents, including those listed by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) or the National Toxicology Program (NTP) as suspected or confirmed carcinogens, or for which toxicological/epidemiological studies have indicated that the chemical has reproduction, acute, and or reactive hazard(s). In addition, any hazardous chemical that is used in such a way as to present the potential for an exposure above the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's Permissible Exposure Limits (PEL) or the American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienist's Threshold Limit Values (TLV), requires committee review.

Institutional Biosafety Committee

This Committee addresses ethical, scientific and regulatory issues related to infectious diseases and biological agents. Institutional Biosafety Committee approval must be obtained prior to using microbiological/infectious agents and/or recombinant DNA molecules in research.

Additional information about these Committees as well as application materials can be obtained at: http://www.uthouston.edu/safety/manuals-and-forms.htm

Student Research

Students as Personnel on UTHealth Faculty Research Projects: Many UTSPH students participate as personnel in research being conducted by UTSPH or UTSPH faculty members. A student's involvement in such projects must be approved by all appropriate committees (CPHS, AWC, IBC, etc.). In general, students can be added as personnel to an existing approved protocol by submitting a change request to the appropriate committee.

Classroom Projects: Instructors who wish to include a research project or analysis of existing data as part of a course (e.g. to explore statistical methods or other methodological issues, etc.) should obtain CPHS approval for the class project. In general, applications for class projects involving contact with or analysis of data from human subjects should be submitted to CPHS (through iRIS) by the course instructor. Briefly, the application should include: the class objectives; the types of research activities that will be included in the course; a description of faculty oversight for the project; and an acknowledgement that any student activities that exceed the boundaries of the class would need to be submitted as individual projects (e.g. if a student wants to expand upon a classroom project, for instance, for use as a culminating experience). Students who wish to expand on a class project should contact CPHS to determine whether additional approvals will be required for their project. Questions regarding classroom projects should be directed to Cynthia Edmonds, Director, Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (CPHS), at: Cynthia.L.Edmonds@uth.tmc.edu, or 713-500-7936.

Student Research: Many UTSPH students will engage in an independent research project as part of their academic program, such as the MPH written culminating experience, MS thesis, or PhD/DrPH dissertation. As with all UTSPH research projects, student projects must be reviewed by the appropriate Institutional committees before the research is initiated.

The IRB approval process for student projects is generally identical to that of faculty projects. However, for students who plan to undertake a project that falls within the scope of, or is closely-related to, an existing UTHealth faculty member's CPHS-approved protocol, it may be possible for the study PI to obtain IRB approval of the student's project by submitting a personnel change request/protocol amendment to the existing, approved protocol in iRIS. Similarly, students may already be listed as personnel on the UTHealth faculty member's study in question. In this case, the approval letter for the existing protocol or approval of an amendment to the existing protocol, can serve as the student's CPHS approval for the CE/thesis/dissertation project, as long as all of the work to be undertaken for the CE/thesis/dissertation is covered within the approved protocol.

Alternately, students needing IRB approval for their CE/thesis/dissertation who have not been added to a UTHealth faculty member's approved protocol in iRIS must obtain CPHS approval by submitting their own application to CPHS in iRIS. All student CE/thesis/dissertation projects needing IRB approval *must always* receive approval through the UTHealth CPHS, either by being added to an existing protocol with CPHS approval (as above), or by submitting an application for the student's own project in iRIS. When necessary, approval through another institution's IRB (i.e., Baylor IRB, MDACC IRB, etc.), should be obtained as well for the student's CE/thesis/dissertation proposal. Outside IRB approval may be required in addition to, but never in place of, the UTHealth CPHS

approval/exemption.

Students undertaking a written CE, thesis or dissertation project must complete all required training and obtain all necessary committee approvals before their project will be approved by the Assistant Dean of Academic Affairs and Student Services. It is the responsibility of the student and his/her research committee to determine which approvals are required, and to apply for, obtain and maintain all such approvals.

Students should visit the appropriate UTHealth website for the most current and complete information (see above), and/or contact the appropriate program official at UTHealth to ensure they have obtained the appropriate training and approvals needed before initiating their project. Brooke Burns in the Office of Academic Affairs and Student Services is available to help students determine which approvals may be required at Brooke.Burns@uth.tmc.edu. Students should visit the UTSPH Student Research pages at: https://sph.uth.edu/research/student-research/ for detailed instructions on submitting the student CE, thesis, or dissertation proposal to the Office of Academic Affairs and Student Services, and to the UTHealth CPHS in iRIS.