

Epidemiology, Ph.D.

Degrees Offered

- Doctor of Philosophy

Nature of the Program

PH.D. IN EPIDEMIOLOGY

The Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Public Health Sciences, Epidemiology Major, prepares students for careers in research, teaching, and public health practice. Students develop research and teaching skills in epidemiology through coursework and practice opportunities. The curriculum provides rigorous and comprehensive training in epidemiologic methods for clinical and population-based research including study design, statistical analysis and interpretation of results, as well as research areas of focus for epidemiologic research including chronic diseases, infectious diseases, injury, occupational health, substance use, maternal health, lifestyle behaviors, rural health, and clinical trials. The first years of the program emphasize research and statistical methods complemented by theoretical and process-oriented coursework relevant to epidemiology. The latter years will largely be dedicated to dissertation research.

Ph.D. graduates in the Epidemiology Major work as faculty members in academic institutions; scientists in research centers, e.g., the National Institutes of Health (NIH), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Institute for Occupational Health and Safety (NIOSH), or the pharmaceutical industry; or may assume leadership positions in state or federal health agencies (such as CDC, Food and Drug Administration [FDA], and the Environmental Protection Agency [EPA]).

FACULTY

CHAIR

- Bethany Barone Gibbs - PhD (Johns Hopkins University)

PROFESSORS

- Robin Pollini - PhD (Johns Hopkins University)
- Sijin Wen - PhD (The University of Texas Health Sciences Center at Houston)

ASSOCIATE PROFESSORS

- Ruchi Bhandari - PhD (West Virginia University)
- Christa Lilly - PhD (Vanderbilt University)

ASSISTANT PROFESSORS

- Caroline P. Groth - PhD (University of Minnesota)
- Tyler D. Quinn - PhD (University of Pittsburgh)
- Toni Rudisill - PhD (West Virginia University)

RESEARCH PROFESSOR

- Gordon Smith - MB, ChB (MD equivalent), MPH (University of Otago Medical School, Harvard School of Public Health)

RESEARCH ASSISTANT PROFESSOR

- Cara Stokes - PhD (West Virginia University)

ADJUNCT FACULTY

- Diane Gross - DVM, PhD (The Ohio State University)
- Brian Hendricks - PhD (West Virginia University)
- Michael Stevens - MD, MPH (Virginia Commonwealth University)
- Matthew Tenan - PhD (University of Texas at Austin)

EMERITUS

- Kimberly Innes - PhD (Cornell University)
- Sarah Knox - PhD (University of Stockholm)
- Ian R. H. Rockett - PhD (Brown University)

Admissions for 2025-2026

If you are ready to apply to West Virginia University School of Public Health, the admissions team is here to assist you.

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (PH.D.) IN PUBLIC HEALTH SCIENCES (EPIDEMIOLOGY MAJOR) ADMISSION GUIDELINES

- A Master's degree in Public Health or a closely related field is strongly preferred. Exceptional applicants with a Bachelor's degree in a relevant field may also be considered.
- A minimum GPA of 3.0 is required, 3.5 is preferred.
- Preferred GRE scores of 150 Verbal; 155 Quantitative; and 3.5 Writing. Submission of GRE scores are optional. Applicants may submit GRE scores if they feel that scores enhance their application.
- International students must meet WVU's minimum score requirements for English language proficiency. (<https://graduateadmissions.wvu.edu/how-to-apply/apply-for-2023-2024/international-graduate-applicant/>)

APPLICATION PROCESS

Applying to the Ph.D. program is a two-step process in which prospective students first submit an application through the national SOPHAS service, <http://www.sophas.org/>. If you are accepted into the Ph.D. program by the School, the next step is for you to complete a WVU Graduate Application, <https://graduateadmissions.wvu.edu/>.

The SOPHAS application requires:

- Official test scores
- Official transcripts from all US institutions attended
- A Personal Statement
- 3 Letters of Recommendation
- Current CV/Resume

Applicants must indicate their first choice of Major and may indicate a second choice (you are allowed a maximum of two choices).

There is a SOPHAS application fee. However, SOPHAS grants fee waivers based upon financial need for McNair Scholars, Gates Millennium Scholars, as well as for AmeriCorps and Peace Corps Volunteers.

TIPS for completing the SOPHAS application:

- **APPLY EARLY!** Allow up to 4 weeks for SOPHAS to verify your transcripts and test scores and send them to the Universities to which you have applied. *Your application may not be reviewed if it does not contain verified transcripts and test scores.*
- *If opting to submit your GRE scores, be sure to use the college code 0157 for the WVU School of Public Health. This code MUST be used so that verified scores are sent by SOPHAS to the WVU School of Public Health for review.*
- Submit your application once you have provided the required information. DO NOT wait for SOPHAS to receive transcripts, recommendations or test scores prior to submitting your application.

Personal Statement

The Personal Statement is a critical piece of the application. The content of the Statement and the applicant's writing skills will be evaluated in the admissions decision. The Statement should address the following in no more than 1000 words:

- What is it about Public Health that interests you?
- What is it about your selected major, specifically, that interests you?
- What are your career goals?
- What topics or areas of research do you wish to pursue and why? If you have identified a potential dissertation topic, briefly describe that as well.
- Which faculty members in the SPH do you see as being potential mentors to help you succeed in your area of interest?

Applicants should also include any additional information about their interests, background, prior experience, or special circumstances that may be helpful to the School of Public Health Admissions Committee. Contacting potential faculty mentors prior to the application process is encouraged.

Letters of Recommendation

Three letters of recommendation are required. At least two of these should be from people who can attest to your academic abilities.

Deadlines

Please refer to SOPHAS for the current deadline. Applications received after this deadline will not be considered. All admissions are for the Fall semester. We do not admit students into the Ph.D. program in the Spring or Summer semesters.

Review process

All completed and verified SOPHAS applications are first reviewed by the Admissions Committees of the major to which an applicant has applied (EPID, OEHS, or SBHS). Candidates that are recommended for admission at this level, are put forth to the School of Public Health Doctoral Admissions Committee, which makes the final decisions on admissions and funding.

Advanced Standing for Applicants with a Master's Degree

Students who enter the Ph.D. program with an MPH or approved Master's degree are eligible for *Advanced Standing*. This allows students to complete an abbreviated course of study that takes between 2 and 3 years to complete, depending on the student's past course work and current interests.

PhD Major Code: 8411

Doctor of Philosophy

MAJOR REQUIREMENTS

Code	Title	Hours
A minimum GPA of 3.0 is required.		
BIOS 610	Biostatistical Methods and Inference	3
BIOS 611	Data Management and Reporting	3
BIOS 620	Applied Linear Models HS	3
BIOS 621	Categorical Data Analysis HS	3
BMS 700	Scientific Integrity (and Ethics)	1
EPID 501	Epidemiology for Public Health	3
EPID 711	Methodological Issues in Design & Analysis of Cohort Studies	3
EPID 712	Quantitative Methods in Epidemiology	3
PUBH 510	Contemporary Foundations of Public Health Practice	2
PUBH 701	Public Health Grant Writing	3
PUBH 796	Graduate Seminar (Taken 2 times for 1 credit)	2
PUBH 797	Research (Two 1-hour research rotations)	2
PUBH 790	Teaching Practicum (Two 1-hour experiences)	2
Electives		15
Qualifying Examination - written and oral components		
Dissertation Proposal		
Dissertation Research (minimum credit number shown)		27
PUBH 797	Research	
Dissertation Defense		
Total Hours		75

PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS FOR STUDENTS ENTERING WITH ADVANCED STANDING

Students entering the EPID PhD program that are admitted with advanced standing (that already hold strongly relevant Master's degrees) will work with the departmental PhD advisor for a recommended course of study. This includes initiating a selection of course credits that can be transferred (600 level and above, graded B or above, passed in the last 5 years) and/or waived that ultimately will be reviewed and approved by the PhD Program Director in consultation with the PhD Advisory Committee. Under typical circumstances a student with a recent MPH degree or similar, can expect to transfer and/or waive up to 20 credits or roughly one year of course work.

ELECTIVES

Courses may be selected from among the Department, School, or University's many course offerings. This will allow students to develop an area of focus. These courses will be discussed and approved with the faculty advisor.

TEACHING PRACTICUMS

Students will complete two (1 credit) teaching practicums (PUBH 790) during which they will spend time in a mentored relationship with a faculty member, assisting with the administration and teaching of a course. These may be graduate or undergraduate level courses. Students who have a strong interest in teaching should also consider taking C&I 789 Teaching in Higher Education (3 credits). This is a general methods course involving instructional concepts and strategies for present/prospective faculty in higher education.

**Full-time HSC-funded stipend students are expected to participate in the SPH teaching mission to a greater degree.*

QUALIFYING EXAM

The qualifying examination is the capstone experience for the EPID PhD program. Successful completion of the examination signifies competence in the field of epidemiology and indicates readiness to engage in independent research. Following completion of the majority of the PhD coursework, students are then eligible to take the qualifying examination, which consists of two components, a written exam and an oral defense as follows:

Written exam: The written exam will consist of questions related to epidemiology and required course work.

Oral defense: The oral component consists of a defense of student's answers to the written exam and includes additional questions that further test the student's understanding of key concepts in epidemiology and knowledge specific to the student's research focus. The oral defense of the written exam must be attempted within two academic weeks of completing the written exam. *Note: Students are not eligible to begin their dissertation, or sign up for dissertation credits, until they have successfully completed both components of the qualifying examination.*

RESEARCH

The research component of the EPID PhD program consists of both a dissertation (27 credits, minimum) and completion of two research rotations (2 credits).

Research Rotations: Students will participate in two research rotations during their first two years, meeting and working with research faculty with similar interests in order to develop mentorships for dissertation research.

Dissertation: Students will complete a dissertation in which they design and conduct an original work of research. First, students will develop a proposal for an original research project. This proposal will be presented and defended orally before the student's dissertation committee. Upon successful completion of the proposal defense, students are admitted to PhD candidacy and may then complete their dissertation research. There are two options for the dissertation format, a traditional book format or a three Journal Article Format (JAF). The decision of which format to use is something that students should discuss with their committee chairperson. Regardless of the format selected, students must have a minimum of one first-authored publication based on their dissertation topic area, accepted for publication in a peer-reviewed journal before they can defend their dissertation. While the required publication may come from one of the student's three dissertation articles if using the JAF, this is not mandatory. Upon completion of the written dissertation, the student will present and defend their work before the dissertation committee. *Note: The dissertation defense is open to all members of the WVU community and the public.*

University Doctoral Degree Requirements: For further details on WVU's requirements for Doctoral programs please visit the following website: http://catalog.wvu.edu/graduate/advisingcoursesdegrees/degree_regulations/.

PLAN OF STUDY

Upon matriculating into the PhD program, students should contact the EPID PhD Program Coordinator, or their advisor if already identified, to discuss the course requirements and to develop a plan of study (POS) to meet their individual needs. Below is a suggested POS with the minimum requirements for students entering the program with a BA/BS. *Note: Research credits show below reflect the minimum requirements. Students may enroll in additional research credits as necessary to achieve the degree competencies.*

SUGGESTED PLAN OF STUDY

First Year

Fall	Hours	Spring	Hours
BIOS 610		3 BIOS 620	3
BIOS 611		3 PUBH 796	1
BMS 700		1 PUBH 797	1
EPID 501		3 Elective	3
PUBH 510		2 Elective	3
		12	11

Second Year

Fall	Hours	Spring	Hours	Summer	Hours
EPID 711		3 BIOS 621		3 Qualifying Exam	
PUBH 790		1 EPID 712		3	
PUBH 796		1 PUBH 701		3	
PUBH 797		1 PUBH 790		1	
Elective		3			
Elective		3			
		12		10	0

Third Year

Fall	Hours	Spring	Hours		
Elective		3 PUBH 797		10	
PUBH 797		7			
Dissertation Proposal					
		10		10	

Fourth Year

Fall	Hours				
PUBH 797		10			
Dissertation Defense					
		10			

Total credit hours: 75

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**Program Competencies**

- Develop effective strategies for teaching in higher education
- Review and synthesize pertinent literature and formulate focused research questions that address identified knowledge gaps
- Design and conduct original research that uniquely contributes to the public health scientific knowledge
- Disseminate research findings through appropriate peer-reviewed publications and presentations, and to other public health community audiences

Major Competencies

- Design investigations of acute and chronic conditions, as well as other adverse health outcomes in targeted populations.
- Analyze and evaluate data from epidemiologic investigations, and disease and injury surveillance systems.
- Evaluate health behaviors and outcomes in populations by such variables as age, sex, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and disability.
- Critically evaluate results of epidemiologic studies, including study design, analysis results, and conclusions.
- Prepare written and oral reports and presentations to effectively communicate to professional audiences, policymakers, and the general public.
- Prepare research proposals for extramural peer-reviewed funding.
- Promote and model ethical conduct in epidemiologic practice.
- Bring epidemiologic perspectives to the development and analysis of public health policies.