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 consulting. 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, and gene by environment interactions. The program’s etiologic orientation is based on the premise that knowledge of genetic, physiologic, behavioral, and environmental factors contribute to understanding the underlying causes of complex human diseases needed to develop and evaluate effective preventive and treatment measures. 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) 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)

PROFESSOR

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

ASSOCIATE PROFESSORS

• Diane Gross - DVM, PhD (The Ohio State University)
• Robin Pollini - PhD (Johns Hopkins University)

ASSISTANT PROFESSORS

• Ruchi Bhandari - PhD (West Virginia University)
• Brian Hendricks - PhD (West Virginia University)
• Toni Rudisill - PhD (West Virginia University)

RESEARCH ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR

• Cara Stokes - PhD (West Virginia University)

ADJUNCT ASSISTANT PROFESSOR

• Miguella Mark-Cares - PhD (Cornell University)
  Office of Epidemiology and Prevention Services, WV DHHS

EMERITUS

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

Admissions

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-2020-2021/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.

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.

**Admission Requirements 2023-2024**

The Admission Requirements above will be the same for the 2023-2024 Academic Year.

PhD Major Code: 8411

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**MAJOR REQUIREMENTS**

A minimum GPA of 3.0 is required.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Code</th>
<th>Course Title</th>
<th>Credits</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BIOS 603</td>
<td>Applied Biostatistics 2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIOS 611</td>
<td>Data Management and Reporting</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIOS 621</td>
<td>Categorical Data Analysis HS</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMS 700</td>
<td>Scientific Integrity (and Ethics)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPID 675</td>
<td>GIS Applications in Public Health</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPID 711</td>
<td>Methodological Issues in Design &amp; Analysis of Cohort Studies</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>EPID 712</td>
<td>Quantitative Methods in Epidemiology</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PUBH 610</td>
<td>Contemporary Foundations of Public Health Practice</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>PUBH 611</td>
<td>Epidemiology for Public Health Practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>PUBH 612</td>
<td>Research Translation and Evaluation in Public Health Practice</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>PUBH 701</td>
<td>Public Health Grant Writing</td>
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<tr>
<td>PUBH 796</td>
<td>Graduate Seminar (Taken 2 times for 1 credit)</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>PUBH 797</td>
<td>Research (Two 1-hour research rotations)</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>PUBH 790</td>
<td>Teaching Practicum (Two 1-hour experiences)</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Electives</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Qualifying Examination - written and oral components</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Dissertation Proposal</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Dissertation Research (minimum credit number shown)</td>
<td>27</td>
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<tr>
<td>PUBH 797</td>
<td>Research</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Dissertation Defense</td>
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**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 generally as well as those pertinent to the student's research focus.

**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 year, 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, at least under review 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**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Year</th>
<th>Fall</th>
<th>Hours</th>
<th>Spring</th>
<th>Hours</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BIOS 611</td>
<td>3 BIOS 603</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>BIOS 621</td>
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<td>BMS 700</td>
<td>1 BIOS 621</td>
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<td>PUBH 701</td>
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<tr>
<td>PUBH 610</td>
<td>2 PUBH 797</td>
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<td>PUBH 621</td>
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<tr>
<td>PUBH 611</td>
<td>4 Elective</td>
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Second Year

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<tr>
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<th>Hours</th>
<th>Spring</th>
<th>Hours</th>
<th>Summer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EPID 675</td>
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<td>EPID 712</td>
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<td>EPID 711</td>
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<td>PUBH 790</td>
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<tr>
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Third Year

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<tr>
<th>Fall</th>
<th>Hours</th>
<th>Spring</th>
<th>Hours</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elective</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>PUBH 797</td>
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<td>PUBH 797</td>
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Fourth Year

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fall</th>
<th>Hours</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PUBH 797</td>
<td>10</td>
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</tbody>
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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.

COURSES

EPID 601. Public Health Epidemiology. 3 Hours.
Examines mortality and morbidity trends, disease and injury models, data sources classification, measures of frequency and association, research design, casual assessment, data interpretation, and screening from an epidemiological perspective.

EPID 611. Concepts and Methods of Epidemiology. 3 Hours.
PR: BIOS 610. An in-depth examination of the theory of epidemiology and its application to general epidemiologic research, including problem conceptualization, sound study design, research conduct, and interpretation of findings with depth of understanding expected of masters-level students.

EPID 612. Applied Epidemiology for Public Health. 3 Hours.
PR: EPID 611. This course covers the derivation of epidemiological measures, assessment of relevant study designs, and drawing inferences from these sources of data to assess and respond to public health problems.

EPID 623. Epidemiology and Public Health Practice at the Health Department. 3 Hours.
An introduction to public health practice at the Health Department. The class will strengthen students’ perspective and understanding of the work performed by epidemiologists at local and state health departments. Each class will cover a separate area of work for the Health Department. This class will consist of lectures, discussions, case based exercises and field experiences.
Epidemiology, Ph.D.

EPID 625. Principles of Clinical Trials. 3 Hours.
Students will apply the core elements of clinical trials and learn to address their major challenges by critically evaluating clinical trial literature, designing original clinical trials and developing grant proposals in clinical trial research.

EPID 629. Epidemiology Capstone. 2 Hours.
The Epidemiology Capstone is the culminating experience for MPH students in epidemiology. It requires students to demonstrate their ability to synthesize and integrate the core public health and epidemiology knowledge and competencies via a paper and oral presentation. (Grading will be Pass/ Fail.).

EPID 663. Public Health Surveillance. 3 Hours.
This course includes presentations and discussions of epidemiologic principles, basic statistical analysis, public health surveillance, field investigations, surveys and sampling, and epidemiologic aspects of current major public health problems in international health. The course will cover chronic and infectious diseases surveillance, and procedures and policies for data collection, compilation, and reporting. Metrics developed by the WHO will be used.

EPID 675. GIS Applications in Public Health. 3 Hours.
PR: PUBH 611 and PUBH 612. This course provides students with foundational GIS skills to access, store, manipulate, and descriptively analyze spatially referenced health data. Students will gain intermediate proficiency with ESRI ArcGIS software, and gain exposure to GIS capabilities within R.

EPID 676. Spatial Epidemiology. 3 Hours.
PR: EPID 675. The purpose of this course is to provide students with technical training in spatial epidemiology. A wide range of statistical methods and software packages for analysis of areal and point data are covered. Instruction is focused on the practical application of methodologies and concepts in spatial epidemiology in public health research.

EPID 690. Teaching Practicum. 1-3 Hours.
PR: Consent. Supervised practice in college teaching of epidemiology. Note: This course is intended to insure that graduate assistants are adequately prepared and supervised when they are given college teaching responsibility. It also provides a mechanism for students not on assistantships to gain teaching experience.

EPID 691. Advanced Topics. 1-6 Hours.
PR: Consent. Investigation in advanced topics that are not covered in regularly scheduled courses.

EPID 692. Directed Study. 1-6 Hours.
Directed study, reading, and/or research.

EPID 695. Independent Study. 1-9 Hours.
Faculty-supervised study of topics not available through regular course offerings.

EPID 696. Graduate Seminar. 1-3 Hours.
PR: Consent. Each graduate student will present at least one seminar to the assembled faculty and graduate student body of his or her program.

EPID 711. Methodological Issues in Design & Analysis of Cohort Studies. 3 Hours.
PR: Consent. An in-depth examination of methodological issues related to the design and analysis of epidemiologic cohort studies. Comparison of different approaches to the analysis of epidemiologic data. Investigation of the role analytic methods decisions play in determining the accuracy, validity, and meaningfulness of analytic outcomes.

EPID 712. Quantitative Methods in Epidemiology. 3 Hours.
PR: EPID 711 and BIOS 603. Applied quantitative methods essential to core training of epidemiology majors. Prepares students to conceptualize and conduct epidemiologic research using secondary database. Develops an understanding of the underlying principles, practical application, and correct interpretation of the epidemiologic results using appropriate multivariable models.

EPID 740. Gene X Environmental Interactions and Chronic Diseases. 3 Hours.
The goal of this course is to inform students about the role of environmental factors in gene expression related to complex diseases such as CVD and cancer.

EPID 766. Physical Activity Epidemiology. 3 Hours.
PR: EPID 710. This course provides an in-depth examination of the epidemiology of physical activity. The course builds upon basic epidemiological methods and explores the relationship between physical activity and chronic diseases.

EPID 769. Occupational Epidemiology. 3 Hours.
PR: BIOS 610 for MPH students and EPID 710 for PhD students. Application of epidemiology to occupational disease and injury. Occupational hazards, including concepts of exposure and dose, as well as study design considerations unique to occupational studies, especially design challenges and analytic implications, will be covered.

EPID 770. Nutritional Epidemiology. 3 Hours.
This course addresses the role of nutrition and food components in primary, secondary, and tertiary disease prevention. Through cooperative learning, students will practice critical thinking skills in the study of nutrition in chronic disease prevention.

EPID 771. Infectious Diseases Epidemiology. 3 Hours.
PR: PUBH 611 or EPID 611 or consent of the instructor. This course is designed to cover the basic epidemiological, public health, economic, surveillance, prevention and other issues related to infectious diseases. The focus includes the major infectious diseases experienced globally as well as those specific to the United States.
EPID 790. Teaching Practicum. 1-3 Hours.
PR: Consent. Supervised practice in college teaching of (subject matter determined by department/division/college/school offering the course). NOTE: This course is intended to insure that graduate assistants are adequately prepared and supervised when they are given college teaching responsibility. It also provides a mechanism for students not on assistantships to gain teaching experience.

EPID 791. Advanced Topics. 1-6 Hours.
Investigation of advanced topics not covered in regularly scheduled courses.

EPID 793. Special Topics. 1-6 Hours.
A study of contemporary topics selected from recent developments in the field.

EPID 795. Independent Study. 1-9 Hours.
PR: Consent. Faculty-supervised study of topics not available through regular course offerings.

EPID 796. Graduate Seminar. 1-3 Hours.
PR: Consent. Each graduate student will present at least one seminar to the assembled faculty and graduate student body of his or her program.

EPID 797. Research. 1-9 Hours.
PR: Consent. Research activities leading to thesis, problem report, research paper or equivalent scholarly project, or a dissertation. (Grading will be S/U).