



University of
Pittsburgh®

School of
Public Health

Master of Science in Health Services Research and Policy

Student Handbook

Academic Year 2025-2026

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I. Overview

The Master of Science (MS) in Health Services Research and Policy program prepares graduates for positions in health services research and policy, analytics and also prepares them for higher level education (such as a Ph.D.). Graduates will be prepared to conduct research on policy issues affecting the organization, financing, and delivery of health care and public health services.

Health Services Research is a “Multi-disciplinary field of inquiry, both basic and applied, that examines the use, costs, quality, accessibility, delivery, organization, financing and outcomes of health care services to increase knowledge and understanding of the structures, processes and effects of health services for individuals and populations.”

As public health professionals, health services researchers and policy researchers use a systems approach to understanding health of populations. The research focus can be on policies at the national, state and local level, the management and operation of organizations or public health agencies, as well as the experience of individual users of health care and public health services.

A. Mission

The mission of the MS program is to train students for excellence in conducting health services research and policy.

B. Objectives

Students undertake a rigorous program of study that encompasses research skills and quantitative analysis and provides a strong theoretical grounding in health policy, economics, health behavior, research design and ethics. The program integrates experiential and classroom learning. Professional development as a researcher is encouraged through the Doctoral Research Professional Development seminar series and attendance at regular health services research seminars.

II. Prerequisites for Admission

In addition to the standard Pitt Public Health admission requirements applicants must have:

- QPA of 3.0 or higher (undergraduate degree)
- undergraduate or graduate calculus with a 3.0 or higher
- GRE scores in at least the 50th percentile in all categories

Applicants must apply through SOPHAS, the centralized online application service: sophas.org. More information on the application process can be found on the Pitt Public Health Website: <https://www.publichealth.pitt.edu/hpm/admissions>. For more information, please direct all enquires to hsrp@pitt.edu.

III. Summary of Requirements

A. Courses

Students are required to complete 22 core credits and 11 area of focus credits. Students will work with their academic advisor to identify an area of focus with at least 11 credits (included in the 42-credit total) that focuses on a discipline or area of interest. They must complete a minimum of 42 credits in order to graduate. In order to reach the required credit hours, students must choose relevant electives in consultation with their advisor.

Required Core Courses

Course Number	Course Title	Credits	Term	Grade
BIOST 2041	Intro to Statistical Methods	3	F	
BIOST 2142	Applied Regression Analysis	3	S	
BIOST 2143	Longitudinal and Clustered Data Analysis	2	F	
EPIDEM 2110	Principles of Epidemiology	3	F	
HPM 2001	Health Policy and Management in Public Health	3	F	
HPM 2905	Quasi-Experimental Design for Health Services Research	3	F	
PUBHLT 2011	Essentials of Public Health	3	S	
PUBHLT 2022	Grand Rounds (2 semesters)	0	F/S	
HPM 3508	Research Credits (Thesis)	1-2	F/S	
	Total Credits	22		

B. Example Areas of Focus

Health Policy and Economics (HPE) Area of Focus Suggested Elective Credits

Course Number	Course Title	Credits	Term	Grade
CLRES 2107	Comparative Effectiveness Research	2	F	
HPM 2028	Microeconomics Applied to Health	3	F	
HPM 2064	Health Policy Analysis	2	S	
HPM 2216	Health Insurance: Financing Health Care	3	S	
HPM 2220	Cost Effectiveness Analysis	1	F/S	
	Total Credits	11		

Decision Sciences (DS) Area of Focus Suggested Elective Credits

Course Number	Course Title	Credits	Term	Grade
HPM 2028	Microeconomics Applied to Health	3	F	
HPM 2124	An Introduction to Simulation Modeling in Public Health	2	S	
HPM 2215	Computer Methods in Decision and Cost-Effectiveness Analysis	1	F/S	
HPM 2217	Clinical Decision Analysis	1	F/S	
HPM 2220	Cost Effectiveness Analysis	1	F/S	
IE 2086	Decision Models	3	F	
	Total Credits	11		

C. Required Examination

Comprehensive Examination

Master's students must successfully pass the comprehensive exam given during the 1st semester of their second year in the program. Students must review a journal article of their choice and give an oral presentation to their peers and department faculty. The journal article must be relevant to Health Services Research and Policy. In the event of a failure, a student may apply to the Chair of the Department for a re-examination. Students who are not permitted to retake the examination or who do not pass the re-examination will be released from the program.

Information on rules regarding committee composition can be found in Pitt Public Health's [Academic Handbook](#).

D. Thesis Requirements

Master's Thesis

A good thesis topic provides the student with an opportunity to apply health policy concepts and develop research skills. The thesis should advance knowledge and ideally, answer one or more important questions. The thesis is an important step in training the student to ask good questions as well as learning how to go about answering them. A good thesis will consist of a policy paper of publishable quality which must report on work done as a student and involve analytic methodologies used during the program. All theses must be prepared and submitted electronically, according to the University guidelines for the submission of ETDs (electronic thesis and dissertation). The guidelines for preparation and submission can be found here:

<https://www.sph.pitt.edu/academic-handbook/graduation-information/detailed-essay-thesis-and-dissertation-rules>.

Thesis Committee

The members of the thesis committee are selected by the student in conjunction with their faculty advisor. The School of Public Health and the University of Pittsburgh have established regulations for the composition of the committee. Please refer to Pitt Public Health's [Academic Handbook](#) for regulations governing the composition for the MS thesis committee. Once the committee members are identified the student is responsible for notifying the MS program coordinator of the committee members. A memo requesting approval of the student's committee is sent to the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs. **Committee meetings cannot be held until the committee is approved by** Student Affairs. The Student Services Coordinator will notify the student and their faculty advisor upon approval. The student is responsible for scheduling the committee meetings. If a conference room or audio-visual equipment is needed, the student must contact the MS program

coordinator in advance of the meeting to reserve the room and/or equipment. Regardless of whether the student requires assistance for the meeting, they are to notify the MS program coordinator of their meeting date to allow for keeping of departmental records, and to ensure that the appropriate paperwork is completed at the meeting. The first thesis committee meeting is to be held within **five (5) months** of passing the MS comprehensive examination. **Please note: Prior to committee meetings, students must submit their research proposal/progress report to all thesis committee members two (2) weeks in advance.**

First Thesis Committee Meeting

After passing the master's comprehensive exam, the student must hold a thesis committee meeting and submit a research proposal for approval. **Please note: Prior to the first committee meeting, students must submit their research proposal to all thesis committee members two (2) weeks in advance.**

Information to include in proposal:

- A. Project significance and background
- B. Specific aims
- C. Preliminary data
- D. Research methods/design

Proposal Format:

- A. 6-10 pages
- B. Double spaced
- C. Times new roman or Arial
- D. 1" margins

Thesis Format

The format will include a narrative and tables/figures of the research and will be similar in format to that of a traditional doctoral dissertation. A student must be registered for at least one credit during the term in which they are graduating. A student who has an inactive status must be readmitted and registered for three credits in order to graduate.

The student's thesis must provide evidence of original scholarly research. The student's thesis committee will meet at the time the student's research is nearing completion and will authorize the student to begin writing the thesis. At this time, students should make certain that all required courses have been taken. This can be verified by the MS program coordinator. The style and format of the thesis must conform to the standards set forth by the Graduate Council as shown below. The thesis will contain the following:

- A. Title Page
- B. Abstract
 - 350 words or less
 - State the principle objective or purpose and the scope of the thesis
 - Briefly describe the methodology use
 - Summarize the result (own words, DO NOT USE CITATIONS)
 - State the principle conclusions
 - MUST include a statement of the study's public health significance/importance or relevance
- C. Introduction
 - Identify the problem
 - State the scope and focus of the study

- State the purpose/objective of the study of the hypothesis to be tested (research project)
- D. Review of the Relevant Literature
 - Review the journal articles, books, etc. that relate to the topic
 - Summarize the major findings from these studies
 - Indicate gaps, weaknesses, and deficiencies in these studies that relate to the current knowledge of the topic
- E. Methodology or Program Design
 - Describe in full detail how the information (data) in the study is collected and analyzed
 - Include definitions of terms (if any)
- F. Results/Findings
 - Present the representative data
 - Repetitive determinations should be given in tables and graphs
 - Present the results with crystal clarity, clearly and simply stated
 - Avoid redundancy/repetition
 - If there are tables and graphs, briefly summarize the important and pertinent points from them
- G. Discussion
 - Present the principles, relationships, and generalizations shown by the results
 - Discuss, do not recapitulate the results
 - Point out any exceptions
 - Define unsettled points
 - Show how the results and interpretations agree or contrast with the previously published work in the literature review
 - State the limitation of your study or problems that were identified
 - Discuss the theoretical implications of the study as well as any practical applications
 - Give any recommendations
- H. Conclusions
 - Summarize the major findings and the evidence for each conclusion
 - State the conclusion(s) as clearly as possible
 - Present the public health significance/importance, or relevance of the study
- I. Bibliography (follow APA style)
 - Include all citation in the thesis from the Introduction, the Literature Review and Discussion
 - Choose one format. Consistency is the key.

Thesis Presentation and Defense

Upon completion of the thesis work, the students will present their work in a seminar and defend their dissertation in an oral examination. The student is responsible for scheduling the presentation and defense of their master's thesis. ***The student is required to submit their thesis to the committee at least two weeks prior to the defense date to allow ample time for the committee to review the thesis.*** Noncompliance with this rule could necessitate rescheduling of the defense date.

Submission of Thesis

Information on submitting the thesis can be found in the Pitt Public Health [Academic Handbook](#).

IV. Competencies

1. Compare the organization, structure and function of health care, public health and regulatory systems across national and international settings
2. Design an applied health policy research project using appropriate research methods (e.g., quasi-experimental design)
3. Interpret results of data analysis for public health research, policy, or practice
4. Apply knowledge of health services research relevant disciplines and quantitative methodology to synthesize and critique published research

V. Learning Objectives

Upon completion of the MS degree, the graduate will be able to:

1. Demonstrate **breadth of HSR theoretical and conceptual knowledge** by applying alternative models from a range of relevant disciplines.
2. Apply appropriate quantitative methods in analysis and problem solving.
3. Apply **in-depth disciplinary knowledge and skills** relevant to health services research.
4. Apply knowledge of the structures, performance, quality, policy, and environmental context of health and health care to **formulate solutions for health policy problems**.
5. **Pose innovative and important health service research questions**, informed by systematic reviews of the literature, stakeholder needs, and relevant theoretical and conceptual models.
6. Know how to collect primary health and health care data obtained by survey, qualitative, or mixed methods.
7. **Implement research protocols** with standardized procedures that ensure reproducibility of the science.
8. **Ensure the ethical and responsible conduct of research** in the design, implementation, and dissemination of health services research.

VI. Policies and Procedures of Pitt Public Health

Pitt Public Health Academic Handbook

The school maintains an academic handbook that covers and lists many requirements for the master's degree programs in addition to school and/or university policies and procedures. The handbook is accessible on the school's website at <https://www.sph.pitt.edu/academics/forms-handbook/academic-handbook/graduation-information>.

All school and university forms can be found on the School's [Forms and Handbook page](#).

Course Registration and Enrollment

Registration for each term must be done with the advice of the student's academic advisor who is also required to sign off on all [enrollment forms](#) prior to the posted registration deadlines. Class schedules are available at <https://psmobile.pitt.edu/app/catalog/classSearch>. Once completed and signed students should return their enrollment form to the program coordinator (jessdornin@pitt.edu) so the advising hold can be removed. Students can register for courses through PeopleSoft only after their advising hold has been removed. Some courses will require permission for enrollment given by the faculty member/department who sponsors the course. Students must request a permission number, when necessary, in order to enroll in the course. If you are seeking information about courses, permission numbers, faculty, or other opportunities please refer to the listing of departmental student services staff available at <https://www.sph.pitt.edu/admissions-aid/contact-admissions>.

Graduation

You must apply for graduation by submitting an application in PeopleSoft and a [Prior Degree Form](#) early in the term in which graduation is expected. Students are required to be registered for at least one credit in the term in which they graduate. It is the student's responsibility to ensure all graduation/program requirements have been met. Additionally, before a degree can be posted, all I and/or G grades must be reconciled.

Graduation instructions/information can be found on Pitt Public Health's [graduation information page](#).

Academic Integrity

Students will be expected to comply with the [University of Pittsburgh's Policy on Academic Integrity](#). Any student suspected of violating this obligation for any reason during their time in the program will be required to participate in the procedural process, initiated at the instructor level, as outlined in the University Guidelines on Academic Integrity. This may include, but is not limited to, the confiscation of the examination of any individual suspected of violating University Policy. Furthermore, no student may bring any unauthorized materials to an exam, including dictionaries and programmable calculators.

To learn more about Academic Integrity, visit the [Academic Integrity Guide](#) for an overview of the topic. For hands-on practice, complete the [Understanding and Avoiding Plagiarism tutorial](#).

University Counseling Center

The [University Counseling Center](#) provides confidential personal counseling for all University students. The Center is located at 119 University Place. If you are in distress, please contact 412-648-7930 at any time to speak directly with a clinician.

Disabilities

If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and [Disability Resources and Services](#) (DRS), 140 William Pitt Union, (412) 648-7890, drsrecep@pitt.edu, (412) 228-5347 for P3 ASL users, as early as possible in the term. DRS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

The University of Pittsburgh does not tolerate any form of discrimination, harassment, or retaliation based on disability, race, color, religion, national origin, ancestry, genetic information, marital status, familial status, sex, age, sexual orientation, veteran status or gender identity or other factors as stated in the University's Title IX policy. The University is committed to taking prompt action to end a hostile environment that interferes with the University's mission. For more information about policies, procedures, and practices, visit the [Civil Rights & Title IX Compliance web page](#).

If there are instances of the aforementioned issues, please contact the Title IX Coordinator, by calling 412-648-7860, or e-mailing titleixcoordinator@pitt.edu. Reports can also be [filed online](#). You may also choose to report this to a faculty/staff member; they are required to communicate this to the University's Office of Diversity and Inclusion. If you wish to maintain complete confidentiality, you may also contact the University Counseling Center (412-648-7930).



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