

**Vanderbilt University  
PhD Program in Epidemiology**

**Student Handbook  
2016-2017**

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## Introduction

Welcome to the Vanderbilt PhD Program in Epidemiology. We hope this handbook will be a valuable resource during your graduate studies.

This handbook is designed to supplement the *Vanderbilt University Graduate School Catalog* ([http://gradschool.vanderbilt.edu/documents/Graduate\\_School\\_Catalog\\_2015-2016.pdf](http://gradschool.vanderbilt.edu/documents/Graduate_School_Catalog_2015-2016.pdf)) and the *Vanderbilt University Student Handbook* ([http://www.vanderbilt.edu/student\\_handbook/](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/student_handbook/)). Students are expected to familiarize themselves with the information contained in each of these resources.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information presented in the handbook is accurate and complete. However, students should be aware that errors and omissions do sometimes occur. Direct communications from the program office supersede the content of this handbook.

### PhD Program Leadership

The following faculty and staff are responsible for management and administration of the program:

#### Director of Graduate Studies

Katherine E. Hartmann, MD, PhD

#### Associate Director of Graduate Studies

Todd L. Edwards, PhD

#### Program Manager

Amanda J. Harding, MS

### PhD Program Office

Administrative offices for the PhD Program in Epidemiology are located at:

Doctoral Program in Epidemiology  
Institute for Medicine and Public Health  
Vanderbilt University Medical Center  
2525 West End Avenue, 6<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Nashville, TN 37203-1738  
Telephone: (615) 936-8320  
Fax: (615) 936-8291

<http://medicineandpublichealth.vanderbilt.edu/epi-phd/index.php>

Vanderbilt University Graduate School

The PhD Program in Epidemiology is an academic program of the Vanderbilt University Graduate School and is governed by the academic requirements established by the Graduate School located at:

117 Alumni Hall

2205 West End Avenue

Nashville, TN 37240

Telephone: (615) 343-2727

Fax: (615) 343-9936

<http://gradschool.vanderbilt.edu/>

# Overview of the Vanderbilt PhD Program in Epidemiology

The unique focus of the PhD Program in Epidemiology is training epidemiologists with unparalleled excellence in advanced quantitative methods who have a strong grasp of causal logic, inference, probability and other theoretical aspects of study design and data analysis, in addition to content area expertise. The curriculum features classroom, computing, and experience-based teaching. The program integrates training and research across clinical, laboratory, and quantitative disciplines. At the completion of the program, graduates will be prepared to develop an independent research portfolio in academia, research or industry. Our goal is to train critical thinkers prepared to make fundamental advances using rigorous and cutting-edge approaches to research. Graduates will be able to contribute across a wide spectrum of content areas and research foci.

## Training Objectives

Skills to be developed through the doctoral training include:

*Critical review.* Students will be able to critically read and synthesize published literature, assess appropriateness of study design and analytic approaches, and recommend and describe additional, feasible approaches. They will be able to compile supporting information, provide historical context and biological plausibility, and work from analogy across related fields, to describe and defend the rationale for research questions or methodologic applications that are novel.

*Study design.* Our graduates will be skilled at conceptualizing and specifying a structured research problem including developing viable alternatives that would allow the conduct and analysis of research that advances current understanding of the problem and addresses gaps in knowledge. They will be able to describe traditional and emerging research designs, compare and contrast strengths and weaknesses, and describe key aspects of “real world” implementation including specification of approaches to calculation of sample size, field logistics, human subject’s considerations, and data analysis, as it relates to the design. They will understand advantages and limitations of each design for addressing specific problems, including practical aspects of their use, such as trade-offs and complexity.

*Study execution.* Students should be able to write a study protocol, know how to recruit subjects, develop study instruments, and collect and manage or supervise the collection and management of data. They will be proficient in data security, management, quality control and documentation methods. Students will be able to design and implement sampling strategies and create randomization schedules.

*Measurement.* Students should be able to apply standard epidemiologic calculations to the measurement of behaviors, conditions and exposures. They should be able to produce the descriptive epidemiology of a given condition, including case definition, calculation of primary measures of disease morbidity and mortality, and appropriate comparisons by person, place and time.

*Analysis.* Students will be experienced in the use of actual research data to conduct analyses that use: dichotomous and multi-level outcomes, time-to-event data, repeated measures data, diagnostic or screening test data, highly correlated data, and case-only data, and be able to explain the proper interpretation of the results as well as the limitations of the methods employed. They should know when and how to examine effects for presence of confounding and effect measure modification, identify their presence and manage them appropriately. Their knowledge should encompass appropriate inclusion of a variety of variable types and specialized approaches to improve model characteristics such as use of splines and propensity scores. They will be able to conduct analysis of diagnostic and screening test characteristics, including use of likelihood ratios; conduct sensitivity analyses; and describe limitations and assumptions of alternative methods for assessing model fit, including approaches to risk prediction and Bayesian modeling. Students also will be encouraged to conduct methodologic research with a focus on furthering cutting-edge epidemiologic methods, while enhancing understanding of specific disease conditions and outcomes. Students should understand the underlying statistical processes of the methods and be able to identify situations in which they should be used, and what the implications of their use are to specific substantive areas.

*Substantive knowledge.* Students should complete course work or obtain adequate experience to develop a working substantive knowledge of clinical issues relevant to their dissertation and anticipated content focus. A clinical certificate program is being finalized for PhD candidates to obtain focused training in physiology and pathology, and to gain exposure to clinical care pathways that relate to the content of their research.

*Proposal development.* At the completion of their coursework, students will understand and have experience developing grants in the style and approach required for federal funding. This will include development of a concise and compelling background section, specification of the research hypothesis, identification of the appropriate study population, description of measurement tools, analysis strategies, human subjects concerns, and budgeting.

*Reporting and communications.* Students should be able to report their research clearly and concisely in multiple formats, including abstracts, posters and manuscripts suitable for publication in epidemiologic and medical journals. This includes submitting the results of the doctoral dissertation for publication.

*Professional preparation.* Students will have been introduced to core topics in multidisciplinary scientific team leadership, research management, and practical aspects of career development.

## **Administrative Structure**

The Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) is responsible for overseeing all aspects of the doctoral program, with support from the Associate Director of Graduate (ADGS) Studies and the help of the Oversight Committee. The DGS, along with ADGS, is responsible for monitoring the progress of each student throughout his or her training. The DGS and ADGS will have the most frequent contact with the students and are responsible for explaining the program requirements to the students as well as monitoring their performance in course work. The DGS and ADGS will

also serve as student advocates when personal problems arise and in hopefully rare cases of faculty irresponsibility, conflict, or misconduct.

The Oversight Committee is composed of a broad spectrum of faculty representing all of the areas of epidemiology included in the training program and advises the DGS on all program and research-related topics pertinent to student training. One of its roles is as an advisory committee on student-related issues, including monitoring student progress, performance, and welfare. The Committee along with the DGS will assess each student's performance at the end of the second year, and determine whether each student will remain in the program. The Committee will also meet with each student once each subsequent year at which time the student will outline his/her research progress and other training activities. This is intended to maintain formal contact with each student, thereby providing encouragement and suggesting modifications of research direction. However, it should be noted that the Committee, while overseeing the progress of all program students will not provide the kind of individualized attention that the Dissertation Committee is required to do. The Committee's purpose instead is to make sure that the goals of the program are met in a more general sense.

# Curriculum

Students are required to complete a total of 72 credit hours, including course work and dissertation research. Selected core courses will be shared with the Biostatistics graduate programs. In addition to the required methods curriculum, students will take content area and advanced methods electives. Students are eligible to take relevant course work for which they meet the prerequisites, in any Vanderbilt department. The program is expected to take four years to complete. Students can accelerate their studies to complete the program in three years.

## Required Courses

BIOS 6311 Principles of Modern Biostatistics  
BIOS 6312 Modern Regression Analysis  
EPID 8301 Introduction to Statistical Computing and Programming Workshop\*  
EPID 8310 Causal Inference  
EPID 8311 Epidemiologic Theory and Methods I  
EPID 8312 Epidemiologic Theory and Methods II  
EPID 8315 Scientific Writing I  
EPID 8321 Applied Epidemiologic Methods in Regression: Binary Data  
EPID 8323 Epidemiologic Methods: Design and Analysis with Time-to-Event Data  
EPID 8325 Scientific Writing II – Proposal Development in Epidemiology  
EPID 8331 Seminars in Quantitative Methods and Measurement  
EPID 8332 Advanced Methods for Epidemiology  
EPID 8340 Content Area Intensives  
EPID 8379 Non-candidate Research  
EPID 8399 PhD Dissertation Research  
PUBH 5518 Research Ethics

\* (can be waived based on programming skills)



## Sample Program of Study

First Semester	Second Semester	Total Credits
<b>First Year</b>		
Causal Inference (3) Epidemiologic Theory & Methods I (4) Current Topics in Research (1) Principles of Modern Biostatistics (4)	Epidemiologic Theory & Methods II (4) Modern Regression Analysis (4) Scientific Writing I (1) Content Area Elective (2)	
	<b>Intercession/Summer</b> Research Ethics (1)	
<b>Credits: 12</b>	<b>Credits: 12</b>	<b>Year: 24</b>
<b>Second Year</b>		
Applied Epidemiologic Methods in Regression: Binary Data (4) Seminar: Quantitative Methods & Measurement (2) Content Area Elective (4)	Epid Methods: Time-to-event Data (4) Content Area Elective (4) Scientific Writing II (2) [Comprehensive Exam]	
<b>Credits: 10</b>	<b>Credits: 10</b>	<b>Year: 20</b>
<b>Third Year</b>		
Non-candidate Research (0-4) Advanced Methods Elective: Splines, propensity score methods, advanced techniques for model fit assessment (modular up to 3) [Dissertation Proposal Defense]	Advanced Methods Elective: Clustered data, repeated measures growth models, advanced methods for missing data (modular up to 3) Methods elective (3) Dissertation (3)	
<b>Credits: 6</b>	<b>Credits: 9</b>	<b>Year: 15</b>
<b>Fourth Year</b>		
Dissertation (3) Methods Elective (2)	Dissertation (4)	
<b>Credits: 5</b>	<b>Credits: 4</b>	<b>Year: 9</b>
<b>Transfer Credits*: 4</b>		
<b>Program Total: 72</b>		
*Advanced quantitative coursework credits likely to transfer from Master's studies subject to approval		

## Course Descriptions

**EPID 8301. Introduction to Statistical Computing and Programming Workshop.** This course is designed for students who seek to develop skills in statistical computing. Students will learn how to use R and STATA for data management, database querying, reporting generating, data presentation, and data tabulation and summarization. Topics include: organization and documentation of data, input and export of data sets; methods of cleaning data; tabulation and graphing of data; programming capabilities; and an introduction to simulations and bootstrapping. Students will also be introduced to LATEX and SWEAVE for report writing. Students will also be briefly introduced to SAS. [2]

**EPID 8310. Causal Inference.** This course will concentrate on conceptually grasping tools of logic and critical thinking as they apply to epidemiologic research. Our emphasis will be on rigorous definition of a causal effect and the minimal conditions necessary to consistently estimate such effects. In a small group format, we will examine case studies and anchor our discussions in readings from philosophy of science, logic, and probability. We will cover examples of valid and fallacious arguments, probability calculus, probabilistic fallacies, applications of Bayes theorem, the frequentist and Bayesian perspective, counterfactual logic, introduction of directed acyclic graphs (DAG), and interpretation of p-values and confidence intervals in epidemiologic research. [3]

**EPID 8311. Epidemiologic Theory and Methods I.** This is the first of a two-course series on advanced epidemiologic concepts and methods that includes measures of disease frequency, measures of effect, descriptive epidemiology, study designs, bias, misclassification and effect measure modification, and ethics in epidemiologic research. A case-based will engage students in demonstrating concepts using actual research data and in critical appraisal of case studies and publications that feature strong and weak examples. [4]

**EPID 8312. Epidemiologic Theory and Methods II.** This second in a two-course series provides an in-depth treatment of concepts and skills in epidemiologic research, including problem conceptualization, study design, data analysis and interpretation. Includes emphasis on how to design studies to best measure etiologic effects and includes advanced discussion of confounding, interaction, and missing data. A continued case-based approach will engage students in demonstrating concepts and methods using the students' own data. Prerequisite: 311: Epidemiologic Theory and Methods I. [4]

**EPID 8315. Scientific Writing I.** Participatory course in which students develop skills in presenting research results in manuscripts, abstracts, and posters. Students work in small groups to write and critique published and unpublished manuscripts, with a focus on understanding the essential components of a scientific manuscript or presentation, as well as the process of publishing in the peer-reviewed literature and managing reviewer and editor comments and requests. [1]

**EPID 8321. Applied Epidemiologic Methods in Regression: Binary Data.** Concepts and applications, including logistic regression, binomial regression, ordinal regression, multinomial regression, quantile regression, model building strategy, additive and multiplicative interaction, clustered and longitudinal data, and graphical exploration. Includes computer-based experience with real data. Additional readings in the philosophy and technique of epidemiologic modeling with binary data will be explored in greater depth, including current articles that highlight challenges and novel approaches. [4]

**EPID 8323. Epidemiologic Methods: Design and Analysis with Time-to-Event Data.** Concepts and applications in survival analysis and analysis of incidence rates, including truncation and censoring, life tables, nonparametric approaches (e.g. Kaplan-Meier, log-rank), semi-parametric approaches (e.g. Cox models, proportional hazards regression), parametric approaches (e.g. Weibull, gamma regression) accommodating time-dependent exposures, Poisson regression, sensitivity analysis, bootstrapping, and multiple imputation. Additional readings in the philosophy and technique of epidemiologic modeling with time-to-event data will be explored in greater depth, including current articles that highlight challenges and novel approaches. [4]

**EPID 8325. Scientific Writing II – Proposal Development in Epidemiology.** Participatory course in which each student develops a high quality, detailed research proposal suitable for submission to NIH or AHRQ that includes both a technical proposal and a draft budget justification. Includes lecture, in-class exercises and group processes. [1]

**EPID 8331. Seminars in Quantitative Methods and Measurement** Concepts and application of cross-cutting tools used for unique and/or specialized types of measurement and instrument development for areas such as physical activity, clinical laboratory tests, and imaging studies. [2] May be repeated

**EPID 8332. Advanced Methods for Epidemiology.** These methods electives will be taught in modular format, most often with three modules on related methods topics, which will vary annually. Students will explore methodological issues in epidemiology like measurement error, missing data, intermediate variables, complex study designs, meta-analysis, splines, propensity scores, simulation. Exercises with provided datasets and the student's own data will be included. [1-3] May be repeated

**EPID 8333. Analytic Techniques for Genetic Epidemiology.** This course will take an example-based approach to provide students with the skills necessary to conduct statistical association analysis of genetic data from human populations for genetic epidemiology studies. Topics will include quality control, statistical methods for association testing, common study design issues, future directions of genetic epidemiology and advanced topics. [3]

**EPID 8340. Content Area Intensives.** These intensives are offered on a rotating basis and taught by faculty with research expertise in the content area of focus. Areas of epidemiology may include cancer, cardiovascular disease, child health, chronic disease/diabetes, genetics, global health, health care, infectious disease, nutrition, pharmacoepidemiology, reproductive, and social. [1-3] May be repeated

**EPID 8356. Clinical Trials.** Systematic overview of principles in design, implementation, and analysis of clinical trials. Emphasis on applications in chronic disease epidemiology. In-depth details of case examples from cardiovascular disease and cancer treatment and prevention trials will be covered.

**EPID 8357. Decision Analysis and Cost Effectiveness.** Overview and practice of conducting decision analysis, including cost effectiveness in epidemiologic research, and the translation and utility of epidemiologic data.

**EPID 8358. Molecular Techniques for Public Health Research.** This course presents an introduction to the principles of the molecular techniques used in epidemiologic investigations. Emphasis will be on the development of a general understanding of the techniques and vocabulary necessary to communicate with researchers and laboratory personnel involved in the study of disease both at the individual and population level. [Offered intermittently]

**EPID 8359. Event Surveillance and Mathematical Modeling of Dispersion.** Overview and practice of event surveillance and mathematical modeling for a variety of research areas, including infectious disease and environmental epidemiology. [Offered intermittently]

**EPID 8370. Current Topics in Research.** Students attend weekly presentations selecting from the Vanderbilt Epidemiology Center Seminar Series, Biostatistics Clinic, clinical grand rounds on topics related to content area interests, and other relevant seminars. Students will convene with faculty to reflect on and critique components of research presentations relevant to the students' interest and to the contemporaneous topics being covered in the core epidemiology curriculum. Course assignments will focus on critical appraisal of a methodologic challenge identified in a seminar setting that has immediate relevance to the student's own research. [1] May be repeated

**EPID 8371. Special Topics Seminar in Epidemiology.** Faculty offer small groups of students a study course on a topic of mutual interest and concern in the faculty member's area of expertise. [1-3] May be repeated

**EPID 8372. Advanced Readings in Epidemiology.** Additional readings in specialized epidemiologic topics will be explored in depth under the guidance of a faculty member. [1-3] May be repeated

**EPID 8373. Independent Study in Epidemiology.** Designed to allow the student an opportunity to master advanced skills in epidemiology while pursuing special projects under individual members of the faculty in their areas of expertise. [1-3] May be repeated

**EPID 8374. Advanced Readings in Epidemiologic Context, Thought and History.** Reading and discussion of seminal literature in the history of epidemiology as well as contemporary literature that provides social and cultural context for the development of the field, challenges to the application of epidemiologic findings, consideration of roles and history of public health advocacy, and exploration of topics like social justice and research ethics through the lens of fiction, non-fiction, and scientific literature. A core reading will be selected to launch each

semester and students will work as a group to select the balance of the readings for the semester from a recommended source list. Discussions will be facilitated by faculty and students including guest lecturers. Minimum of masters training in quantitative discipline and research experience in epidemiology or related field is required; other graduate students with permission of the instructor. [2] May be repeated.

**EPID 8999. Non-candidate Research.** Research prior to entry into candidacy (completion of Qualifying Examination) and for special non-degree students. [Variable credit: 0-12]

**EPID 9999. PhD Dissertation Research.** [Variable credit: 0 to 12]

## **Program Requirements**

### **Residence and Course Work**

The Graduate School requires completion of 72 hours of graduate work for the PhD degree. All students working full time toward the PhD must register each fall and spring semester. When the required 72 hours of course work has been completed, registration for dissertation research without hourly credit applies; this reflects full-time effort on research and confers full-time student status.

### **Research Preceptor Teams**

Students will be matched shortly after acceptance with research preceptor teams. These established multidisciplinary teams include epidemiology faculty, clinical experts and clinical researchers, biostatisticians, and experienced research staff. The research preceptor team commits to involving the student as a co-investigator from the beginning of the student's graduate studies. Students will use actual data from their research teams in their course work. The goal is to create a mutually beneficial partnership that produces synergy between education, professional development, and the conduct of research. The student will work 15-20 hours per week with the team during the academic year and full time during the summer.

### **Human Research Protections Training**

In accordance with Vanderbilt University Institutional Review Board (IRB) policy, all students must complete human subjects protections training using the online Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Course. Instructions can be found at [http://www.mc.vanderbilt.edu/irb/training/citi\\_instructions.php](http://www.mc.vanderbilt.edu/irb/training/citi_instructions.php). Students should complete the CITI Basic Course in Biomedical Research. This training must be completed prior to beginning courses and working with the research preceptor team.

In addition, students must complete continuing education annually. Continuing education requirements may be met by attending an educational session approved by the IRB (e.g., IRB Essentials, Research Matters, News You Can Use, etc.), a national conference that addresses human subjects protections in research, completion of a CITI Refresher Course, or one of the available optional CITI courses (e.g., Good Clinical Practice, Responsible Conduct of Research, etc.).

### **Teaching Experience**

It is likely that graduates of this program will often take academic positions upon completion, and it is therefore critical that they have teaching experience prior to graduating. To help students become effective teachers, all students are required to have or to gain teaching experience; participating in the teaching of a methods course or seminar is strongly encouraged. A variety of teaching opportunities will be made available to students.

## **The Intradepartmental Review**

The intradepartmental review (IDR) is an opportunity to examine the student's course work and ensure that their remaining semesters are used to appropriately prepare them for graduation. The IDR typically will take place as early as the second semester of the second year and is conducted by a committee of three faculty members, including the student's doctoral advisor. It is expected that by this point the student has picked at least a general topic for the dissertation. The committee reviews the student's curriculum vitae (CV), educational record and dissertation idea and recommends additional coursework and direction for the duration of the doctoral training period, as needed. They also ensure that the student has met or has a plan to meet all requirements of the doctorate, including teaching, ethics and writing training.

## **Comprehensive Examination**

A comprehensive examination will be administered at the end of the second year focusing on the methods knowledge gained during the foundational and mid-level methods portion of the degree. The examination is a two-day take home examination and will include short answer questions, computations, interpretation of computations and analyses, and data analysis. The examination is not offered in the summer semester. A student who has failed the comprehensive examination may retake it only once and no earlier than the end of the semester following the initial examination. The same rules apply as for the first examination. If the exam is not passed on the second attempt, the student can no longer be a PhD candidate in the program.

## **Dissertation Committee**

Once a student has passed the comprehensive examination, he/she will select a dissertation advisory committee of not fewer than four members. The committee will be chosen in consultation with the DGS and the student's advisor. The committee must include two members of the Epidemiology faculty other than the mentor and at least one faculty member from Biostatistics. The DGS will serve as an *ex officio* member of the committee if he/she is not an official member of the committee. The student should meet with his or her dissertation committee for the first time no later than October of the third year and then once every six months. The dissertation committee will serve as a resource for direction and assistance for independent research in the context of senior sponsorship and oversight.

The dissertation committee is intended to bring specialized expertise and resources to a student's research and career development process. The committee guides the development of the student's research and career development, with the dissertation advisor primarily responsible for overall guidance of the student's research and training. The dissertation committee is responsible for administering the final PhD examination and will determine whether the candidate has presented an acceptable dissertation. The chair of the dissertation committee will inform the DGS in writing of the results of the final examination using official forms provided for this purpose, including completion of any required revisions. If all other requirements are satisfied, the DGS will notify the dean of the Graduate School that the student has completed the requirements for the PhD degree.

Candidates for the PhD degree in Epidemiology must present an acceptable dissertation that adds to or modifies what was previously known. The requirements of the Graduate School, as described in the Graduate School Bulletin, must be followed when preparing the thesis. Professional achievement must also be evident and should include the presentation of research work at one or more national meeting(s). Prior to the dissertation defense the student **MUST** have at least one first-authored publication submitted to a peer reviewed scientific journal.

### **Oral Proposal Defense - Doctoral Qualifying Examination**

To qualify for candidacy, a student must complete all of the required first and second year courses, must be in good academic standing (GPA  $\geq 3.0$ ), must pass the comprehensive examination and must pass an oral qualifying examination. The qualifying examination is an oral defense of the dissertation **proposal**, which is a written proposal describing the student's intended doctoral research. The proposal is intended to be detailed and is typically more than 50 pages in length. It will consist minimally of a critical review of the literature, the objective(s) of the research, a statement of specific aims, a proposed approach and analytic plan, and a description of the papers to be written from the research. The student will present the proposed research to the committee, and the committee members will be free to ask questions about any related substantive or methodologic issues that are relevant. The student will submit a draft of the proposal well in advance of the defense and the committee members will return written comments to the student in advance of the defense date.

The examining committee is the student's dissertation committee. The committee must be appointed by the Graduate School no less than two weeks before the time of the qualifying examination. The Graduate School must be notified of the time and place of the qualifying examination at least two weeks in advance. The qualifying examination is not a public examination, and voice recordings of it are not permitted.

There will be three possible outcomes of the examination:

1. Pass;
2. Conditional Pass – Specific conditions and time requirements to meet the conditions will be determined by the committee with approval of the DGS;
3. Fail.

In the case of failure, the student will be given up to four months to retake the examination. The examining committee with approval of the DGS will determine the date of the second examination. Failure to pass a second examination will result in dismissal from the doctoral program.

On satisfactory completion of the oral examination, the student will be admitted to candidacy.

### **The Doctoral Dissertation**

The doctoral dissertation will include the following components: critical review of the literature, a methods chapter to include hypotheses tested and methods applied, two to three manuscripts intended for publication but of somewhat greater detail that is typical in the submitted manuscripts (one of which will have been submitted to a peer-reviewed journal before the



student graduates), and a summary chapter with proposed next research steps in the field. The source of data used in the dissertation research will depend on the research question; either primary data collection or secondary data analysis is acceptable.

It is expected that the student will create a schedule for the dissertation process that ensures that all committee members have had adequate opportunities to review drafts and provide input. The dissertation committee will work with the student to set a date for the dissertation defense, and will take steps to ensure that the student defends only when he or she is ready to do so. The final oral examination (dissertation defense) is administered by the student's PhD committee and is on the dissertation and significant related material; the student is expected to demonstrate an understanding of the larger context in which the dissertation lies.

The chair of the PhD committee or the DGS, after consultation with the candidate and members of the candidate's dissertation committee, shall notify the Graduate School in advance of the place and time of the examination and the title of the dissertation. This should be done no later than two weeks prior to the examination. The Graduate School then formally submits the defense notice to Vanderbilt's electronic calendar. The public is invited to attend the final examination, which is announced in advance in Vanderbilt's electronic calendar. The dissertation defense results form, signed by the committee members and the director of graduate studies for the program, should be forwarded immediately to the Graduate School.

The candidate must pass his or her dissertation defense approximately six weeks before the end of the term in which the degree is to be conferred, so that there is time for final edits to be made prior to submission of the final dissertation to the graduate school for publication. It is the **student's responsibility to assure timing** compatible with the completion of all required steps in time for the intended graduation date.

# Program Regulations

## Honor System

All work submitted as a part of course requirements is presumed to be the product of the student submitting it unless credit is given by the student in the manner prescribed by the course instructor. Cheating, plagiarizing, or otherwise falsifying results of study are specifically prohibited under the Honor System. The system applies not only to examinations but also to written work and computer programs submitted to instructors.

The student, by registration, acknowledges the authority of the Graduate Honor Council. The university's Graduate Student Conduct Council has original jurisdiction in all cases of non-academic misconduct involving graduate and professional students. Students are expected to become familiar with the *Rules Governing the Graduate Honor Council of Vanderbilt University*, available at the time of registration. It contains the constitution and bylaws of the Graduate Student Honor Council, Appellate Review Board, and related regulations. Detailed descriptions of Honor System violations and procedures are also available at [www.vanderbilt.edu/gradschool](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/gradschool).

## Communication

Much of the communication between students, faculty, and other offices and individuals on campus will be through e-mail. Each student is provided with a Vanderbilt e-mail account on enrollment, and this address is made available to faculty, staff, and other students. Frequently students have other e-mail accounts; however, the Vanderbilt account is the one that will be used for all school communications. It is imperative that students check e-mail regularly because e-mail is frequently used to communicate information. Students are held responsible for information disseminated via e-mail.

## Registration

The normal academic, full-time registration is 9 to 13 hours per semester (6 to 9 hours in the summer). Students registered for 9 or more didactic hours per semester (6 or more hours in the summer) are defined as full time. Those registered for 6–8 didactic hours (3 to 5 hours in the summer) are half time, and those registered for less than 6 hours (less than 3 hours in the summer) are part time. After completing the hourly requirements for the degree, full-time students register for PhD (379, 399) research without hourly credit to reflect full-time effort on research.

During each semester currently enrolled students meet with their advisers and DGS to plan their schedules for the coming semester. All students must later complete official registration at the appropriate time using YES (Your Enrollment Services). At the beginning of each semester and the summer session, students must validate their registration by submission of an online registration data form. A late registration fee is charged to students who fail to register by the stated registration dates.

All full-time graduate students, including those receiving scholarship, assistantship, fellowship, or traineeship support through the university, must register each fall and spring semester with no breaks in registration to remain in good standing.

Changes in registration may be made through YES during the change period (the first ten class days of the semester) with consent of the program. A student is not permitted to add or drop a course, change the number of hours in a variable-credit course, or change from audit to credit status after the end of the change period. A student may formally withdraw from a course after the end of the change period with the permission of the department, and a grade of *W* will be given. After the mid-point of the semester, a student is not permitted to withdraw from the course except under certain circumstances. Failing the course is not considered one of the circumstances.

Courses in which there is a significant change in subject matter each semester (e.g., special topics courses) may be repeated for credit within limits noted in the course listings of this catalog.

### **Grading System**

The grading system in the Graduate School includes the letter grades *A*, *B*, *C*, *D*, and *F*. A student will not be granted graduate credit for any course in which a grade less than *C* is received. Grades below *C* may be repeated once at the discretion of the course director and the program. In this situation, the more recent grade will be calculated in the final grade point average. The letter *I* may be used at the discretion of the instructor when the student is not able to complete required work in the normal time. The notation *W* is entered onto the transcript when a student withdraws from a course or from the Graduate School. A grade point average of 3.0 is required for graduation.

The following scale will be in effect for letter grades and grade point averages.

<b>Letter Grade</b>	<b>Grade point value</b>
A+	4.0
A	4.0
A-	3.7
B+	3.3
B	3.0
B-	2.7
C+	2.3
C	2.0
C-	1.7
D+	1.3
D	1.0
D-	0.7
F	0

*S/U* grades are given every semester for all research courses (369, 379, and 399), regardless of the number of hours registered. The accumulation of three (3) *U* grades over the course of study will lead to dismissal from the program and the Graduate School.

Students receive grades in all courses except those approved for credit/non-credit, audits, and some seminars. An *I* that is not replaced by a letter grade within one year may be changed to the grade *F* at the discretion of the instructor; otherwise, the *I* may become permanent and remain on the transcript as such.

Certain courses approved by the graduate faculty for credit/non-credit or Pass/Fail count toward total hours. Courses that are strictly no-credit, however, do not count toward total hours or in calculating grade point average, although grades for such courses are entered on the student's record.

With the instructor's permission, students are permitted to audit certain courses. Students who audit are expected to attend the course regularly. Students must be registered for regular courses in order to audit. Audits are listed on the student's transcript. Audits are limited to two per semester.

### **Grade Change Policy**

For a student enrolled in the Graduate School, a grade recorded in the University Registrar's Office may be changed only upon the written request of the instructor, endorsed by the appropriate official (usually an associate dean) within the school/college that offered the course, and then the approval of the associate dean of the Graduate School. An instructor's petition to change a grade must include a brief rationale for the change. Changing a recorded grade is a serious matter and, in general, petitions will be approved only upon certification that the original grade was in error or, in the case of an Incomplete, that the outstanding requirement(s) have been completed. Request for exceptions to this policy should be directed to the associate dean of the Graduate School and will be considered on an individual basis; these may require additional certifications and approvals.

### **Transfer Credit**

Certain master's degree courses are transferable toward the PhD. To transfer, the course cannot be a required course used to earn a degree in another program. Elective courses taken that are relevant to the scope and training of the PhD program in epidemiology can be transferred at the discretion of the Director and Associate Director of Graduate Studies for the PhD in Epidemiology. In very special cases, the university allows a maximum of 48 semester hours of transfer credit may be applied toward the PhD. Our program policy is to transfer only upper level graduate courses that were not required for the prior master's degree program.

### **Academic Performance**

All students must maintain an overall B (3.0) grade point average (GPA) in their didactic coursework. Student progress will be monitored by the Director of Graduate Studies and

Associate Director of Graduate Studies, who will meet with each student at least once per year. Students are to meet with an advisor each semester to review progress. If a student's GPA drops below 3.0, he/she will be placed on academic probation. If the GPA is still below 3.0 after two more semesters, the Oversight Committee will evaluate the student's overall performance, and he/she may be dismissed from the program. Continued financial support is contingent upon maintaining an overall GPA of 3.0 and taking a full course load each semester.

### **Advising Program**

Each incoming student will be assigned a faculty advisor who is a member of the Vanderbilt Epidemiology Center and/or holds a PhD in epidemiology and is not a member of their research preceptor team, although the advisor could become a dissertation committee member. The student is required to meet with his or her advisor at least once a semester to complete a progress report and obtain their advisor's signature, and is encouraged to meet more often as needed to discuss dissertation progress, plan course work, and/or discuss career plans. It is the student's responsibility to initiate these meetings. Students can change advisors if desired, as long as the student has obtained agreement from the Epidemiology Program Office and the new advisor, who must be a VEC faculty member and/or a member of the teaching faculty with an epidemiology PhD.

### **Student Grievances and Appeals**

Students who believe their academic performance has not been judged reasonably or fairly, or who believe their intellectual contributions have not been fairly acknowledged, should discuss their concerns with the DGS. If the student's concerns cannot be resolved at the program level, the student may then request a further review of the issues in question by the associate dean for graduate studies or similar official in their school dean's office. The student may appeal the outcome of the school-level review to the Graduate School.

### **Leave of Absence**

The Graduate School requires continuous registration except for summer sessions. Students who want to interrupt their graduate study must petition the department, who on their behalf apply to the Graduate School for an authorized leave of absence. Leave of absence is granted for a maximum of one year. Those without authorized leave who do not register are dismissed from the Graduate School and are not considered students. If they want to resume graduate study at Vanderbilt, they must petition for reinstatement.

### **Intent to Graduate**

The Intent to Graduate form must be submitted to the Graduate School at the beginning of the semester in which the student expects to receive a degree. Students should check the University Academic Calendar each semester to determine deadline dates. Intent to Graduate forms are available at the Graduate School Web site, [www.vanderbilt.edu/gradschool](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/gradschool).

## Academic Calendar

The following calendar contains key dates for the 201-2017 school year from the Vanderbilt University academic calendar. The complete calendar can be found at <http://registrar.vanderbilt.edu/calendar.htm>.

<b>FALL SEMESTER 2016</b>	
Aug 19, 2016	International Graduate Student Orientation (10 A.M. to 12 P.M.)
Aug 22, 2016	Orientation for new Graduate School students (10 A.M. to 12 P.M.)/ Epi PhD department orientation (8 A.M. to 10 A.M.)
Aug 23, 2016	Epi PhD Research Team Lunch/ Orientation
Aug 24, 2016	Fall 2016 classes begin
August 31, 2016	Fall registration on YES ends at 11:59 P.M.
Sept 7, 2016	Last day to add a class, drop a class with no entry on the record, or register for pass/fail status
Oct 13-14, 2016	Fall Break October 13-14
Oct 27, 2016	Spring 2017 Registration Window Open
Nov 15, 2016	Student progress reports due
Nov 18, 2016	Registration ends for Spring 2017 classes
Nov 19-27, 2016	Thanksgiving holiday
Dec 8, 2016	Fall classes end
Dec 17, 2016	Fall 2015 semester ends
<b>SPRING SEMESTER 2017</b>	
Jan 9, 2017	First day of Spring classes
Jan 16, 2017	No class in observance of Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday
Jan 23, 2017	Last day to add a class, drop a class with no entry on the record, or register for pass/fail status
Mar 4-12, 2017	Spring holiday
April 24, 2017	Spring classes end
May 12, 2017	Commencement

## Resources for Students

YES (Your Student Enrollment Services) Registrar and Student Records

<https://medschool.vanderbilt.edu/registrar/yes>

OAK Course Management Software

<http://www.vanderbilt.edu/oak/>

Academic Record Access

<https://webapp.mis.vanderbilt.edu/student-search>

Graduate School Catalog

[http://gradschool.vanderbilt.edu/documents/Graduate\\_School\\_Catalog\\_2015-2016.pdf](http://gradschool.vanderbilt.edu/documents/Graduate_School_Catalog_2015-2016.pdf)

The Eskind Biomedical Library

<http://www.mc.vanderbilt.edu/biolib/>

The Writing Studio

<http://www.vanderbilt.edu/writing/>

Thesis and Dissertation Guidelines

[http://www.vanderbilt.edu/gradschool/current\\_students/pdf/ThesisGuide.pdf](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/gradschool/current_students/pdf/ThesisGuide.pdf)

Vanderbilt Center for Teaching

<http://www.vanderbilt.edu/cft/>

Graduate Student Council

<http://studentorgs.vanderbilt.edu/gsc/>

Student Recreation Center

<http://www.vanderbilt.edu/CampusRecreation/>

Student Health Center

<https://medschool.vanderbilt.edu/student-health/>

Psychological and Counseling Center

<http://www.vanderbilt.edu/pcc/>

Additional resources can be found at <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/students.html>.

The site <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/swa/> contains links to many of the interactive web applications available to Vanderbilt students.