



**HEALTH SCIENCES**  
Health Research Methodology  
Graduate Program

**PHD STUDENT GUIDE  
TO GRADUATE STUDIES**

**2024-2025**

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## HEALTH RESEARCH METHODOLOGY GRADUATE PROGRAM GUIDE TO PhD GRADUATE STUDIES

This guide outlines the policies and procedures followed by the Health Research Methodology (HRM) Graduate Program, which operates within the Faculty of Health Sciences at McMaster University as a component of the Health Sciences Graduate Programs. The Graduate Policy administers graduate studies in the Faculty of Health Sciences and Curriculum Committee under the auspices of the School of Graduate Studies as described in the current **SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES CALENDAR**. This Guide is a supplement to the SGS (School of Graduate Studies) Calendar and **does not provide a comprehensive set of binding** regulations. This document is not intended to replicate or modify the information found in the School of Graduate Studies (SGS) Calendar (<https://academiccalendars.romcmaster.ca/index.php?catoid=48>). **If there is any discrepancy between this document and the SGS Calendar, then the School of Graduate Studies Calendar shall prevail.** Students and faculty are encouraged to look at the SGS Calendar for information about:

- Graduate study at McMaster
- General regulations of the School of Graduate Studies
- University regulations
- Graduate fees and financial assistance
- University regulations affecting graduate students
- University services
- Fellowships, scholarships, bursaries, and other awards
- University governing bodies
- Student appeals
- Degree programs (including degree requirements).

Updates, along with, news and announcements are also posted on the HRM website - please check the website regularly for latest information: <https://hrm.healthsci.mcmaster.ca/>

### **HRM Program Leadership and Administration**

The Department of Health Research Methods, Evidence, and Impact (HEI) is the administrative and intellectual home of the HRM program, although the HRM faculty come from across the Faculty of Health Science.

The Vice Dean, Health Sciences, and Associate Dean of Graduate Studies (FHS (Faculty of Health Sciences)) is jointly appointed by the School of Graduate Studies and the Faculty of Health Science to oversee graduate programs in health sciences.

The Assistant Dean for HRM is a faculty member in the Department of Health Research Methods, Evidence and Impact who provides faculty-level leadership and oversight of the HRM program.

Each field of specialization has a Field Leader. The field leaders make recommendations about field specific curriculum changes and approve education plans for students in the field.

The HRM Program Manager oversees the day-to-day management of the HRM program and works with the Assistant Dean in developing the curriculum. The Program Manager supervises other HRM staff. The Program Manager is normally the first point of contact for students who need help in managing their time in the program.

*Decision-making and Getting Help.*

- Your supervisor is usually the first person to approach with academic or personal problems. She or he carries the overall responsibility for all aspects of your degree work.
- Questions about policies and procedures are best directed to the HRM Program Manager. HRM program staff will sometimes direct inquiries to the Assistant Dean. Most policies and procedures are summarized on the HRM website and contacts for specific inquiries are provided.
- Students may consult the Assistant Dean regarding a variety of matters beyond routine procedural inquiries. These may include interpreting the applicability of regulations and policies, concerns about supervision or personal problems affecting work, or if the student wishes to deviate from regulations in consideration of a particular circumstance. In such cases of petitions for special consideration, the Assistant Dean is normally required to approve the student's request, which is then adjudicated by the Vice Dean, Health Sciences and Associate Dean Graduate Studies (FHS). As such, the support of the Assistant Dean does not guarantee that a request for special consideration will be approved.

## **I. THE FIELDS OF SPECIALIZATION**

The HRM program can provide students the opportunity to *specialize* in one of three 'fields of specialization.' The three fields are: clinical epidemiology, biostatistics, and health technology assessment. Please note that Biostatistics is only offered at the PhD level.

The establishment of fields of specialization within the HRM program is first and foremost a *student-centred* initiative that emerged in part as a response to informal specialization by students. Students who opt for a field of specialization align themselves with a specific area of expertise and focus on the acquisition of corresponding core knowledge and skills. In so doing, individuals optimize the impact of HRM training on their overall professional development and graduate with formal recognition.

The original HRM program, wherein students opt not to declare a field of specialization will continue to be available as "*HRM Classic*." Students in HRM Classic pursue a general methods degree and may explore other areas such as medical education research, public and population health, health systems and services, health informatics or health ethics, to name but a few.

### **How to Select a Field**

An overview of each of the three fields is provided below. The degree requirements for all fields are 1. Three Required Courses; 2. Comprehensive examination; 3. Thesis. Further information about field specific requirements can be obtained from the HRM website: <https://healthsci.mcmaster.ca/hei-hrm>) and/or the relevant field leader. Please note that applicants interested in more than one field are advised to select HRM Classic.

## **Clinical Epidemiology**

The field of clinical epidemiology employs sound research principles, tempered with practicality, to find the best answers to “real world” questions about clinical practice and health care. These key questions have to do with:

- how to screen for and diagnose disease and risk factors for disease;
- how to prevent, treat, ameliorate, or rehabilitate health problems;
- how to predict the course of disease;
- how to determine the cause of health problems;
- how to measure “burden of illness,” “quality of life,” and the effects of health services innovations;
- how to systematically summarize evidence from research; and
- how to increase the quality of health care and improve outcomes.

Individuals training in the field of clinical epidemiology (who usually have a clinical background) will acquire the knowledge and skills required to undertake research to address these fundamental questions. Individuals training in this field receive lectures from world leading clinical epidemiologists who are conducting their research all over the world and changing the way medicine is practiced globally. This field also offers individuals supervision from the same renowned clinical epidemiologists to allow individuals the practical experience of designing, organizing, and conducting clinical research.

The field of clinical epidemiology in the Health Research Methodology Program offers a unique opportunity to learn and work with the best clinical epidemiologists in the world, thus enabling graduates to make profound contributions to the practice of clinical medicine through research.

Students can enter the clinical epidemiology field if they fulfill the following criteria:

1. They have a designation of a health care provider based upon a degree or diploma (e.g., doctors, physiotherapists, nutritionists).
2. Their HRM degree research primarily focuses on studies directly relevant to patients (e.g., randomized controlled trials, observational studies, or systematic reviews of health-related questions).

If a student is not a designated health care provider and wants to appeal these criteria then towards the end of their HRM training they can submit a summary of the research (e.g., course papers, studies and research) that they have undertaken to the Clinical Epidemiology field leader who will review the student’s request to determine if it merits the designation of the clinical epidemiology field specialization.

## **Biostatistics**

The HRM Biostatistics PhD field targets applicants with an MSc in Mathematics and/or Statistics who wish to pursue doctoral work in Biostatistics. The field aims to provide graduates with the skills needed to conduct independent research into biostatistical topics, provide leadership as biostatistical collaborators in clinical, health systems and population health investigations and effectively teach biostatistics. Graduates will possess the following skills:

- a strong foundation in biostatistical concepts/techniques and their application in study

- designs and data analysis;
- the ability to critically appraise methodologic aspects of research proposals and manuscripts;
- the ability to develop or contribute to the development of grant proposals as methodologists;
- the ability to teach or communicate biostatistical concepts effectively to non-biostatisticians; and
- the ability to adapt existing statistical techniques or to develop new techniques to solve problems.

In addition to coursework related to research design, all students participate in a course on Biostatistical Collaboration. The aim is to develop the skills needed for successful collaborative research in the role of biostatistical consultant. These include communication of biostatistical concepts and the provision of leadership with respect to research design, analysis, and reporting.

### **Health Technology Assessment**

Health Technology Assessment (HTA) is defined as the evaluation of the clinical effectiveness, cost effectiveness, and broader impact of drugs, medical technologies, and health systems, both on patient health and the health care system. HTA has gained increasing importance in health care decision making locally and around the world and over the last decade there have been numerous important methodological advances in the techniques of HTA. As a result, there is a growing gap between the need for HTA and the availability of researchers with the skills and knowledge required to conduct HTAs.

The goal of the HTA field specialization is to train individuals who, upon graduation, will have acquired sufficient skills to be actively involved in independent and collaborative research in the field of HTA. Graduates will be expected to:

- develop skills in advanced decision analysis;
- apply research methods derived from health economics;
- understand and use basic and advanced biostatistics; and
- utilize health services research and health policy analysis concepts and methods.

Students will be expected to collaborate with one of the many research groups conducting HTA at McMaster University.

### **HRM Classic**

Students who do not wish to declare a field of specialization should enroll in HRM Classic. The advantage centres on the high level of flexibility HRM Classic offers, enabling students to tailor their educational plan to their own unique needs and interests. Students pursue a general methods degree and may explore other exciting areas of interest including but not limited to the following.

Population and Public Health: The student can focus on developing the methodological expertise needed to conduct cutting edge research to improve the health of individuals, communities, and populations, including investigations into the biological, cultural, economic, and social factors that protect, precipitate, or perpetuate disability and disease.

Health Services Research: Students can focus on conducting rigorous research in patterns of care/process of care, knowledge translation, economic analysis of health care, service and system organization patient experience, theoretical underpinnings of health services organization, management, and financing and delivery in order to deliver high quality clinical and health care, reduce medical errors, and improve patient safety.

Medical and Health Sciences Education Research: Students can work with faculty in the McMaster Education Research, Innovation and Theory (MERIT) program on research related to the evaluation of clinical competence. Alternatively, students might work on medical informatics and knowledge translation research topics, investigating the use of evidence by different professional groups such as health care providers, health systems administrators and government policymakers, and contributing to an improved understanding of the behavioural and contextual factors that determine effective knowledge uptake.

## II. REQUIREMENTS FOR PhD DEGREE COMPLETION

A candidate for the PhD degree must comply with the School of Graduate Studies Regulations for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy, including completion of the equivalent of one and one-half 700-level full courses, as the minimum course requirement (i.e., 3 one-term half courses).

Required courses for each field are specified in the table below. Elective courses may be chosen from among any other HRM course, in consultation with the student's supervisor. With the permission of the Assistant Dean on the recommendation of the supervisory committee, a student may take graduate courses from other programs at McMaster or at another University in lieu of an HRM elective course. The list of courses is available on the HRM website and in the Graduate Calendar.

### *Additional "Make-up" courses:*

Admission to the PhD program normally assumes that a student has a background in the core principles of health research methods at the MSc level, as would be obtained by students who have completed or transferred from the HRM MSc program. Students who have not completed relevant course work may be required to complete HRM courses to make-up these core competencies. These "make-up" courses are *additional* to the required minimum of 3 courses. All students are expected to have completed introductions to health research methods (equivalent to HRM 721) and biostatistics (equivalent to HRM 702) and health research methods (HRM 730 or HRM 751). Other required course equivalents are listed in the course requirement table below. Students who believe that they have obtained the required competencies in ways that are not reflected in their previous graduate coursework may, with the written support of their supervisory committee, request to the Assistant Dean, HRM that the requirement for a make-up course be waived.

### *Requests for alternate course requirements:*

If a student has the equivalent of an HRM course, the student can submit a special petition to request approval that the equivalent course requirement has been completed. Please note that this special petition request is not to reduce the number of HRM courses a student is required to complete for the HRM degree. This process is typically initiated by students who have completed similar courses at other institutions and would like to count previously completed coursework towards the prerequisites and the student can register for other, more advanced

HRM course(s). This is determined on a case-by-case basis and supporting documentation (i.e., course syllabus and signed petition form) must be provided. The special petition form is available from the School of Graduate Studies website: <https://gs.mcmaster.ca/resources>.

Candidates must also:

1. Obtain a grade of at least B- in all courses.
2. Pass a Comprehensive Examination between twelve and twenty-four months for full-time and twelve to thirty-six months for part-time students following the start of doctoral studies at McMaster. The examination will test the student's ability to acquire, evaluate critically, handle and conceptualize major issues in the discipline or sub-discipline to which their field of research belongs.
3. Complete a dissertation or thesis on an approved topic based on research carried out within the program and defend the thesis at a final oral examination. The thesis will demonstrate the student's ability to develop new methodology, or to advance one or several competing existing methodologies in a challenging new area of health care/health services research.

Students may be asked to meet additional requirements of the program, including participation in special seminars or colloquia.

### **Maximum Time Allowed to Complete the Degree**

HRM PhD students are normally expected to complete their degree within 12 terms (4 years) of full-time study or 18 terms (6 years) of part-time study. Financial support to full-time students is normally limited to 12 terms. The prospects for completion by the expected time are a consideration in assessing student progress.

Notwithstanding the expectations in HRM, the graduate calendar further specifies that students will be withdrawn from PhD studies if they do not complete the program within 18 terms of full-time study or 24 terms of part-time study. Please consult the Graduate Calendar for details.

As outlined in the policy on comprehensive evaluations, students *must* complete their comprehensive examinations between 12 and 24 months of full-time study and between 12 and 36 months of part-time study.



## DEGREE REQUIREMENTS FOR FIELDS OF SPECIALIZATION

Please see the attached degree requirement table for clarification regarding the specific courses for each field.

### Fields Initiative – PhD Curriculum Requirements

(2022)

|                     |                                     | FIELDS OFFERED AT THE PhD LEVEL |   |                   |  |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|---|-------------------|--|
| DEGREE REQUIREMENTS |                                     | HRM Classic                     | Clinical Epidemiology                                 | Biostatistics     | Health Technology Assessment           |
| PhD                 | <b>COURSEWORK</b>                   | no common course                |   |                   |  |
|                     | Common Courses                      |                                 |   |                   |  |
|                     | Field Specific Courses              |                                 | 742   | 739               | 740                                    |
|                     | Elective(s)                         | 3                               | 2   | 2                 | 2<br><i>(Usually HRM 706, 743)</i>     |
|                     | Possible Additional Make-up Courses | 721<br>702<br>730 or 751        | 721<br>702<br>730 and 751<br>743                      | 721<br>730 or 751 | 721<br>702<br>730 or 751<br>737<br>741 |
|                     | <b>COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION</b>    | Seminar<br>Independent Study    | Seminar<br>Independent Study is appropriate for field |                   |  |
|                     | <b>THESIS</b>                       | Thesis                          | Thesis topic is appropriate for field                 |                   |  |

## **POLICY – OVERLAP in HRM PROGRAM:**

- This is intended to clarify the Health Research Methodology program policy regarding the overlap between topics used in course assignments, theses, and PhD comprehensive exams. Please note this discussion refers to overlap of subject matter, and it is an academic misconduct to submit the same work for credit more than once.

Sometimes, faculty and students have had difficulty interpreting the current policy regarding overlap. Therefore, the program reviewed our policy and adopted the following policy interpretation statement.

The HRM program “adopts the principle that students avoid duplication, but we do allow overlap (methodological or content area) in courses and theses; adjudication is the responsibility of the students’ Supervisory Committee.”

There can be overlap among course projects and thesis topic., . It was approved that the Board of Comprehensive Examination Chairs (BCEC) should decide whether a PhD student can use similar topics for their examination.

## **III. SUPERVISION AND THE SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE**

Each HRM PhD student will be supervised by a **Supervisor** who is a member of Graduate Faculty. The Supervisor, assisted by a **Supervisory Committee**, will provide leadership and guidance to the student throughout the time that the student is registered in the Program. The supervisor and members of the supervisory committee must be faculty who have been approved by the School of Graduate Studies to be involved in the supervision of HRM students. A list of the faculty who have been approved for PhD supervision is posted on the HRM website: <https://healthsci.mcmaster.ca/hei-hrm/about-us/faculty>.

The School of Graduate Studies graduate calendar outlines the responsibilities of graduate students, their supervisors, and the expectations of a graduate student-supervisor relationship in section 3.1. Refer to the supporting documentation “Getting the Supervisory Relationship Off to a Good Start - . <https://gs.mcmaster.ca/current-students/resources/graduate-supervision/>

## **FIRST MEETING AND EDUCATION PLAN:**

The supervisor is responsible for assembling a Supervisory Committee. The committee must meet with the student within six months from when they first register in the Program. For the PhD student, the committee consists of the supervisor, who will chair the committee, and at least two other members of graduate faculty. Please note: the second member must be approved HRM graduate faculty, and the third member must be either approved HRM graduate faculty or from another Department in which he/she is entitled to supervise graduate students. Additional committee members may be added as required.

After discussing possible Supervisory Committee members, the supervisor then informs the Assistant Dean - HRM to ensure that a Supervisory Committee has been chosen which is appropriate for the student’s proposed research. The Assistant Dean - HRM will advise the supervisor if the intended committee is appropriate or inadequate, as necessary. An Education Plan will be completed by the student in consultation with his/her supervisor in the first three months of the program (<https://healthsci.mcmaster.ca/hei-hrm/education/current-students/resources> ). The Education Plan will name the chosen committee members, summarize the student's thesis topic, indicate field of

specialization, identify the Graduate Courses (M, D or EC) to be taken by the student, and provide the date of the first supervisory committee meeting. In the event of any change in the Education Plan, please submit the PhD Education Plan - Addendum Form to the HRM Program Office, [hrrasst@mcmaster.ca](mailto:hrrasst@mcmaster.ca).

### **COMMITTEE MEETINGS:**

Each HRM student is expected to meet with his/her Supervisory Committee **once every six months** unless the committee believes that more frequent meetings are necessary. A Supervisory Committee meeting may be particularly important if the student is having difficulties with their course work or research project. On these occasions, an extraordinary meeting can be called by either the supervisor or the student.

### **COMMITTEE REPORTS:**

It is the responsibility of both the supervisor and student to ensure that Supervisory Committee meetings take place and are officially recorded by completing a PhD Supervisory Committee Meeting Report. Students initiate the Report using the Online Supervisory Committee Report to complete the form online via mosaic (please contact the HRM Program Office for access details). Only if committee members do not have access to the online system is a hard copy form to be submitted. For the hard copy form, the final signed Report must be completed and emailed to the HRM Program Office after each committee meeting.

On the report, each committee member must indicate whether the progress made by the student respecting course work and thesis research has been 'excellent,' 'good,' 'marginal' or 'unsatisfactory.' Students must summarize their committee report on page 3 of the PhD form and submit it for the committee meeting. PhD students must have a committee meeting at least once during the academic year or the supervisor will be penalized in the amount of \$8,000 for the funding of that student or another student in a subsequent year. If an 'unsatisfactory' or 'marginal' rating is given by any one member, another committee meeting must be held within three months to re-assess the student's progress; the Assistant Dean – HRM may be invited to attend this meeting (as a non-voting member) at the invitation of either the student or the supervisor. If students remain rated as 'unsatisfactory' or 'marginal' by one or more committee members, the supervisor will confer with the Assistant Dean - HRM to decide what further course of action to take. The Graduate Calendar provides in Section 3.4.2 that a student whose work is unsatisfactory may at any time be required to withdraw from the University.

### **SUPERVISOR'S ABSENCE:**

If the supervisor leaves the University temporarily, or is on extended research leave, or is required by the University to perform other duties which prevent effective supervision, the supervisor must make formal arrangements for an interim supervisor (usually another Supervisory Committee member) in consultation with the Assistant Dean - HRM. Written copies of this agreement will be given to the student, to Supervisory Committee members and to the Vice Dean, Health Sciences, and Associate Dean of Graduate Studies (FHS). If the supervisor leaves the University permanently, the supervisor is expected to arrange with the co-operation of the student, the Assistant Dean - HRM and the Vice Dean, Health Sciences, and Associate Dean of Graduate Studies (FHS), to transfer the supervisory duties permanently to another member of graduate faculty (usually a Supervisory Committee member).

In the event of pending retirement, the supervisor will nominate to the Vice Dean, Health Sciences, and Associate Dean of Graduate Studies (FHS) a graduate faculty member who is willing to accept formal responsibility for the supervision of the student. However, Emeritus Faculty may continue *de facto* supervision of their existing students. In special cases, for example that of early retirees, emeritus faculty may be permitted to accept new students or transfer their MSc students to the PhD stream, but only after recommendation by the Vice Dean, Health Sciences, and Associate Dean of Graduate Studies (FHS) and approval from the Dean of the Faculty and the Dean of Graduate Studies of an "Application for Post-Retirement Supervision of a Graduate Student" <https://gs.mcmaster.ca/app/uploads/2020/02/Application-for-post-retirement-supervision-of-a-grad-student.pdf>

### **STUDENT GRIEVANCE:**

If a graduate student is having a disagreement with another person(s) to the extent that present or intended studies/research are upset or interrupted, the student should seek advice from the thesis supervisor. If the conflict directly involves the supervisor, the student should consult another Supervisory Committee member or the Assistant Dean - HRM. In cases where disharmony exists between student and supervisor, an extraordinary meeting of the Supervisory Committee may be called by either the supervisor or student. The Assistant Dean - HRM may wish to initiate and attend the meeting on these occasions.

In rare cases where the conflict cannot be resolved informally by the involvement of the Assistant Dean-HRM, the University provides for formal mechanisms of appeal. Please refer to section 6.3 of the School of Graduate Studies calendar where the appeal procedures are described and directly at the Student Appeals procedure: <https://www.mcmaster.ca/policy/Students-AcademicStudies/StudentAppeal.pdf>

### **CHANGE OF SUPERVISOR:**

It may be possible for a student to change his/her supervisor or the membership of her/his Supervisory Committee, although this is rare. Changes to either supervisor or the Supervisory Committee are at the discretion of the Assistant Dean – HRM. A request in writing to change the supervisor may be made by the supervisor or the student to the Assistant Dean – HRM.

If a student feels that she/he is receiving unsatisfactory supervision, she/he should consult the Assistant Dean – HRM, or if the matter is not resolved by this consultation, the Vice Dean, Health Sciences, and Associate Dean of Graduate Studies (FHS).

Refer to section 3.1 Supervision of the SGS Graduate Calendar: <https://academiccalendars.romcmaster.ca/index.php?catoid=48>

### **WITHDRAWAL FROM THE PROGRAM:**

A student wishing to withdraw for personal reasons completes a "Request for Change in a Graduate Student's Status" form available at: <https://gs.mcmaster.ca/app/uploads/2019/10/Request-for-Change-of-Status.pdf>

## **IV. GRADUATE COURSES**

The courses you take should be planned with the help of your supervisor (and your supervisory committee, when formed). Students must complete the equivalent of one and one-half 700-level full

courses, as the minimum requirements. The specific recommended courses would depend on the student's field of specialization, and their interest in exploring focused areas in depth. Please see the requirements for PhD degree completion on page 6 and the PhD curriculum requirements on page 7/8.

**SGS 101 - ACADEMIC RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND ETHICS – and SGS 201 Accessibility for Ontarian with Disabilities Act (AODA) training are required modules for all graduate students.** All graduate students, including part-time students, must complete both SGS #101 and SGS #201. The School of Graduate Studies requires registered students to complete SGS 101 within the first month of their first term after their admission to graduate studies at McMaster (refer to SGS Graduate Calendar, section 2.6.7). A graduate student may not obtain a graduate degree at McMaster or register in subsequent terms in the HRM Program without completing the training.

#### **IV COURSE REGISTRATION:**

Students must register for courses and add or drop courses in mosaic (<http://www.mcmaster.ca/mosaic/>). If students have completed all their course requirements, they must still access mosaic to register and select SGS 700 (if full-time) or SGS 701 (if part-time) to indicate that they are Research/Writing.

Refer to the SGS Graduate Calendar, section 2.6 for Graduate Course Work:

- i. Averaging of letter grades
- ii. Course levels and types
- iii. Course categories
- iv. Failing Grades and Incomplete Grades

#### **ILLNESS OR UNAVOIDABLE ABSENCE DURING COURSE-WORK:**

If a student is ill or legitimately absent (e.g., for personal or family reasons) prior to an examination or course deadline, please contact the **Course Coordinator** as early as possible, so that arrangements can be made for an extension or deferral.

The HRM Program Attendance Policy includes the following:

- Any absence must be due to a reasonable excuse that is exceptional and out of the control of the student (illness, death in family, special exams etc.).
- One absence from a tutorial with a legitimate excuse is reasonable, 2 may be acceptable at the discretion of the instructor, but if you miss 3 or more tutorials you will not obtain credit for the course. You will be required to withdraw from the course before the last drop deadline or you will receive an 'F' in the course.
- Attendance is considered in the assignment of participation grades. In cases where participation is credited for each session, you will normally receive 0 for participation for any day you are absent.

Please note that students should consult the course material for the specific attendance policy as this is the minimum requirement and each course may have additional requirements for attendance and participation.

## V. PhD COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION

All PhD students are required to pass a Comprehensive Examination as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. For **complete details** please refer to the “**Health Research Methodology Graduate Program Comprehensive Examination Purpose and Procedure Booklet**” which is available from the HRM web site: <https://hrm.healthsci.mcmaster.ca/education/current-students/resources/>

The comprehensive examination process has two educational components: a PhD seminar series of 10 biweekly seminars running from September to April and an independent study, involving part time work over 6-8 months, to allow students to demonstrate their competence in an area of specialization. The PhD seminar series addresses the student’s need to demonstrate breadth of learning, and the independent study empowers the student to demonstrate their depth of specialization.

Full-time students will complete both components of the exam in the second year of their PhD studies. Part-time students may elect to spread the comprehensive examination process over years 2 and 3, completing the PhD seminar and independent studies in alternate years, as appropriate. Failure to successfully complete the Comprehensive Examination within two years of commencing the PhD program for full-time students or by the end of the 36<sup>th</sup> month for part-time students, without approval of the delay by the HRM Board of Comprehensive Examiners, will require withdrawal from the program.

## VI. PhD THESIS REQUIREMENTS AND DEFENSE

For PhD students, the thesis may either take the traditional form or alternatively, be constructed around a core of papers published or submitted for publication (sandwich thesis). For either format, the entire length of the thesis must not exceed 300 type-written, double-spaced pages on letter-sized paper, **including** all figures, tables, references, and appendices. The student should consult the booklet “**Guide For The Preparation of Theses**”, published by the School of Graduate Studies available at the following web site:

[https://gs.mcmaster.ca/app/uploads/2019/10/Prep\\_Guide\\_Masters\\_and\\_Doctoral\\_Theses\\_August-2021.pdf](https://gs.mcmaster.ca/app/uploads/2019/10/Prep_Guide_Masters_and_Doctoral_Theses_August-2021.pdf) which explains the style and format preferred by the School. Theses which do not comply with the regulations will not be accepted for defence.

Please refer to the School of Graduate Studies Graduate Calendar for specific guidelines re the thesis examining committee: (section [3.2](#) and [3.4](#))

## ETHICS PROPOSAL

Each student is expected to include in their graduate thesis a section (of varying length according to the research) addressing the ethical considerations associated with their project including ethical concerns about the hypothesis, question, and findings, as well as the ethical issues related to the proposed methodologies.

It could be assumed that any faculty member with suitable expertise to supervise a student in a given topic would also be capable of providing guidance and support regarding the ethical considerations of the methodologies and subject area selected by the student. Where the supervisor feels added support would be needed this could be provided by a suitable alternative, without needing to be part of the supervisory committee in a formal way. Please direct any questions to Dr. Lisa Schwartz, Arnold L. Johnson Chair in Health Care Ethics and Professor, Department of Health Research Methods, Evidence, and Impact (HEI) ([schwar@mcmaster.ca](mailto:schwar@mcmaster.ca)).

## **GUIDELINES FOR PREPARATION OF SANDWICH THESES** (HRM policy statement approved at GPCC and updated based on the School of Graduate Studies Graduate Calendar)

A sandwich thesis consists of material that is previously published or prepared for publication as one or more journal articles or parts of books. Please refer to the SGS guidelines (<https://gs.mcmaster.ca/current-students/completing-your-degree/masters-thesis/>) for the School of Graduate Studies requirements, the clarifications here are not meant to replace the SGS guidelines but to clarify the sandwich thesis in the HRM context.

### **Process**

1. All work contained in sandwich thesis papers must have been undertaken as part of the PhD research work. Work submitted for graduate courses or comprehensive exams is not eligible for inclusion in the main body of the thesis although these papers may be included as appendices if directly related to the research conducted for the thesis.
2. Permission to submit a sandwich thesis is required from the student's supervisory committee. The School of Graduate Studies should be informed that a sandwich thesis is in preparation at the time the "Nomination of an External Examiner" form is submitted. This information is necessary for advising the potential external examiner on the nature of the thesis.

### **Content of Thesis**

1. Introductory Chapter that sets the context for the research, outlines the general theme and the overall objectives and the implications of the work. Why was this question important to answer?
2. **A minimum of 3 papers each in their own chapter.** These papers can be in any of the following formats and may vary from chapter to chapter:
  - a. a manuscript that is ready for submission for publication
  - b. a manuscript that is written in the form of a publishable paper but is 'expanded' to contain more details than the submitted paper would include. This option would apply, for example, when specific details of the methods appear in a referenced paper. To illustrate, in a paper ready for submission for publication, the reliability and validity of a data collection tool may be described briefly along with a reference to the paper that describes its psychometric properties in detail. In the 'expanded' version of the paper, the reliability and validity of the instrument would be described in detail so that examiners do not need to search out a secondary reference. After the oral defence, it is expected that preparation of the paper for submission should merely involve the shortening of these 'expanded' sections.
  - c. a manuscript that has been submitted for publication
  - d. a manuscript that has been accepted for publication
  - e. a published paper (if the paper is published, please refer to the School of Graduate Studies Guide for the Preparation of Theses for specific guidelines regarding whether to include the paper as it appears in the journal or as a printed copy of the word processing file and see the same guide for instructions for including copyright material in the thesis)

**Note:** the SGS guidelines highlight that normally at least one of the papers must be published or in press at the time the thesis is submitted.

If there is multiple authorship of the separate articles, there must be a preface to the thesis that clearly documents the student's contribution to each of the papers, and the student's contribution to the originality of the work thereby clarifying in what way this work becomes the

student's thesis.

3. **Discussion Chapter** that draws out the overall conclusions and implications of the research **across** the papers and outlines how closely they support the thesis objectives.

The decision about which type(s) of paper to include in the thesis should be made in close collaboration with the thesis committee. For example, a thesis committee may insist that all papers be 'expanded' versions so that they can examine detailed aspects of the student's research.

One advantage of not submitting the papers for publication before the defence is that the external examiner may make valuable suggestions at the oral defence that the student may want to incorporate into the papers.

***If planning to prepare a sandwich thesis, please refer to the University Guidelines for specific details.***

## **PROCEDURE LEADING TO PhD DEFENSE**

### **Plagiarism Check:**

Prior to sending out the pre-defence thesis to your committee, there is a requirement for [iThenticate – Plagiarism Checking Software](#).

Effective December 1, 2023, all graduate students who initiate their defence on or after this date, are required to have their thesis run through McMaster's plagiarism checking software, iThenticate.

iThenticate is a similarity detection tool meant to be used by researchers to check any original works that will be publicly released and who are concerned about potential plagiarism.

According to McMaster's Research Plagiarism Checking Policy, it is expected that all graduate theses, shall be checked for plagiarism in compliance with this policy. Plagiarism checking is expected to occur prior to the coordination of the defence. PhD supervisors will be prompted to confirm this in the Admin Tools system once their students initiate their defence.

Your pre-defence thesis must be uploaded to iThenticate by your primary supervisor before you can initiate your PhD defence in Mosaic.

To protect graduate students' privacy, only academic supervisors will have access to this software and will be responsible for uploading their student's theses.

The defence of the HRM PhD thesis is coordinated by the School of Graduate Studies. Please refer to the SGS website for the procedures and guidelines for completing your degree:

<https://graduate.mcmaster.ca/resources>, including:

- Thesis Defence FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions)
- Writing
- Defending
- Final Submissions
- Forms
- PhD Chair



- Timeline
- Contact information and where to go to for help

The HRM program requires that the PhD thesis defence be conducted in person. The candidate and the full supervisory committee must be present. The external reviewer may participate via an online audio-visual communication modality. If there are extenuating circumstances that require the student or a committee member to participate remotely, approval must be obtained from the Assistant Dean of the HRM program.

## **VII. ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

The HRM program is committed to the McMaster University policies and procedures regarding academic integrity. The integrity policy is available at <http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity>. The School of Graduate Studies requires all students to complete an online course regarding the integrity policy (SGS 101) and it is the student's responsibility to be familiar with the nature of academic dishonesty and the policies that govern the investigation and adjudication of academic integrity matters. When in doubt about the limits of collaborative work or acceptable conduct, the student should consult course coordinators or the Assistant Dean.

### **VII. Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)**

While we acknowledge that the use of Generative AI, such as ChatGPT, may be helpful to your learning, we require you to act with [academic integrity](#) when being assessed. Currently, HRM assessments have not been designed with Generative AI tools in mind and using them threatens the integrity of the assessment.

The main purpose of a university is the pursuit of knowledge and scholarship. As a student at McMaster University, you are expected to practice intellectual honesty and to fully acknowledge the work of others by providing appropriate references in your scholarly work. You must not take credit for work that is not your own. Please note that the McMaster University Academic Integrity policy states under item 18(c) that "It shall be an offence knowingly to ... submit academic work for assessment that was purchased or acquired from another source".

Please check with your course coordinator and the course outline for each HRM course, as course coordinators will provide additional guidance for specific assessments. In general, the direct use of text originating from a Generative AI tool, beyond using the tool to correct grammar/spelling, should be included in quotation marks or equivalent and cited using a citation style appropriate for the context. Should the use of an AI assistant like ChatGPT be permitted for a particular assessment, you must be transparent by including a Generative AI statement as an appendix. This statement needs to declare the specific Generative AI tool used, the [prompts](#) used to create the submitted content, and for which sections/tasks in the assessment you used the tool. If you use Generative AI but do not declare this, the Course Coordinator will refer the case to the Office of Academic Integrity.

## **1 Funding Adjustment Policy**

## **FHS- HRM Policy on the Adjustment of Financial Support and Merit-Based Scholarships**

Effective: 1 May 2024

All full-time doctoral, and many masters', students are guaranteed minimum levels of financial support as outlined in the letter of Offer of Admission. This funding package normally includes contributions from the department or graduate program and contributions from the supervisor (usually funded from research grants and contracts). In some cases, the guaranteed financial package also includes employment as a Teaching Assistant or Research Assistant in lieu of TA.

Externally funded, merit-based scholarships may be included in the guaranteed financial support at the time of admission, thereby offsetting contributions that may be required from the program or the supervisor. For such a student who matriculates with an award in-hand, 100% of the award may count toward the student's guaranteed funding. When a student wins an award after admission, it is common practice to reduce the contributions from one or more other sources. Programs may choose to reduce their contributions to redistribute money to other students and supervisors may reduce their contributions to recoup money in support of their research projects. The HRM program policy establishes the limits for maximum reductions and other relevant conditions.

### **Provisions**

1. Reductions to stipend are permissible when a student wins a merit-based, internal, or external award that is not included as part of a financial guarantee in the letter of Offer of Admission. The calculation of maximum permitted reductions is based on the total of all such awards held.
2. "Total stipends" include the sum of the program/department contributions and the supervisor's contributions and any other McMaster contributions that are not needs-based bursaries or employment.
3. The maximum adjustment to stipends following an award must ensure that the student receives an *increase in remuneration from total stipends and awards equal to at least 20% of the value of the award*. In other words, after winning, the student must be better off financially by at least 20% of the value of the award.
4. Total stipends may not be reduced for awards totaling less than \$5,000.
5. The HRM Assistant Dean must approve any reduction by a supervisor.
6. Adjustments may only be applied following a merit-based scholarship awarded to the student and paid through McMaster. For example, funding adjustments are not permitted as a result of:
  - Employment, including TA employment.
  - Needs-based bursaries
  - Awards to the supervisor
  - Restricted, expense-specific awards, such as travel awards.
  - Scholarships or bursaries not paid through McMaster.

In the example below, a student was guaranteed a total stipend of \$30,000 per year in program

scholarship and supervisor's contributions at the time of admission.

| Award Value |          | Minimum Benefit as % of Award |               |                |
|-------------|----------|-------------------------------|---------------|----------------|
|             |          | Min Benefit (20% of award)    | Min Take-Home | Max in Stipend |
| No External | \$0      | 20%                           | \$30,000      |                |
| <\$5k       | \$1,500  | \$1,500                       | \$31,500      | \$0            |
| OGF         | \$12,000 | \$2,400                       | \$32,400      | \$9,600        |
| OGS         | \$15,000 | \$3,000                       | \$33,000      | \$12,000       |
| CGS-M       | \$17,500 | \$3,500                       | \$33,500      | \$14,000       |
| PGSD        | \$21,000 | \$4,200                       | \$34,200      | \$16,800       |
| Cope        | \$25,000 | \$5,000                       | \$35,000      | \$20,000       |
| CGSD        | \$35,000 | \$7,000                       | \$37,000      | \$28,000       |
| Vanier      | \$50,000 | \$10,000                      | \$50,000      | \$30,000       |
|             |          | *No tax on awards under 5k    |               |                |

For FHS Policy: [FHS Graduate Policy on Adjustment of Financial Support](#)

### 13.0 HELPFUL RESOURCES

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p><b>Health Research Methodology Graduate Programs:</b> <a href="https://healthsci.mcmaster.ca/hei-hrm">https://healthsci.mcmaster.ca/hei-hrm</a></p> <p>information for students, faculty and staff, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ degree requirements, course listing, faculty information</li> <li>▪ news &amp; announcements</li> </ul>               | <p><b>Health Sciences Graduate Programs:</b> <a href="http://fhs.mcmaster.ca/grad/index.html">http://fhs.mcmaster.ca/grad/index.html</a></p> <p>information for students, faculty and staff, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ scholarships</li> <li>▪ FHS Research Plenary</li> <li>▪ student resources</li> </ul>                                |
| <p><b>The Department of Health Research Methods, Evidence, and Impact:</b> <a href="https://healthsci.mcmaster.ca/hei">https://healthsci.mcmaster.ca/hei</a></p> <p>information for students, faculty and staff, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ faculty listing, research groups</li> <li>▪ key contact people in HEI</li> <li>▪ upcoming events</li> </ul> | <p><b>The School of Graduate Studies:</b> <a href="https://graduate.mcmaster.ca/">https://graduate.mcmaster.ca/</a></p> <p>information for current students including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ forms, guidelines, graduate calendars</li> <li>▪ health plan info, dental plan info</li> <li>▪ payroll info</li> <li>▪ thesis regulations</li> </ul> |

HEI (Health, Evidence & Impact) presents “Special Events” such as rounds, lectures, research days,

and symposia. You will receive advance notice of these events via e-mail.

In addition, individual research units may hold their own rounds. If your advisor belongs to one of these units, you are expected to attend these as well.