Doctoral student academic standing guide

This document covers policies regarding academic performance of doctoral students that are specific to the Department of Biostatistics. Students also must satisfy the academic standing requirements of the Johns Hopkins University and Bloomberg School of Public Health.

Academic standing and exams

Doctoral students are expected to stay in good academic standing throughout their PhD studies.

Students are expected to maintain grades of B or higher in core classes. Any core class with a grade lower than a B will need to be retaken.

First year students maintaining B grades in core classes can sit for the first year Departmental exam. Students with any grades lower than a B in core classes must receive approval from the graduate committee to sit for the exams. In the event that students are denied, possible resolutions include postponing the exam for one year, switching to a master’s program or being required to leave the doctoral program based on a consideration by the faculty of overall academic performance.

In the event of a failure of the exam, students are allowed one retake. Student retakes typically occur in the following year, with exceptions occurring when mitigating circumstances are present, such as a leave of absence. In the event of a failure in the retake, the student will be asked to leave the doctoral program, typically with the option to join the master's program. The exams, either a first take or retake, are only given once per year at the start of the summer break (typically in early June).

The grading of the Departmental exam is as follows. Passing scores are determined in by exam writers after grading with examiners blinded from student names. Students who pass all sections of the exam pass the exam. Students failing one or more sections will be discussed by the faculty as a whole. This discussion will include exam and course performance. Possible resolutions include: declaring the student as passing the exam, declaring the student as having failed the exam, take-home remediation of sections of the exam or a full retake (only available if it is the student’s first attempt at the exam).

To maintain good academic standing students must complete their school-wide preliminary oral exam by the end of their third academic year, before the start of the first term of their fourth year (typically late August or early September depending on that year’s academic calendar).

Full funding for tuition and stipend is provided to PhD students for five years. Students are expected to finish their doctoral programs within this time. Students who do not finish within five years may continue in the program for up to two additional years. In these cases a 75%
departmental tuition scholarship is provided, but students are responsible for the remaining tuition, their own health insurance, and living expenses. Personal office space cannot be guaranteed for students beyond the five-year point. Common areas (Biostatistics Library, Genome Cafe) remain available for use by these students.

**Program changes from PhD to ScM or MHS**

In the event that a doctoral student switches to the ScM or MHS programs the following should be noted.

Funded doctoral students forfeit their funding in the event of a program switch.

Students have the option of switching to part time status after switching programs. However, visa residency requirements of maintaining full-time student status typically prevent foreign students from being able to switch to part time.

MHS and ScM students receive a 75% tuition reduction in their second year and beyond provided that they have taken 12 credits of courses outside of the Department, at least 6 credit hours of which from the School of Public Health, and have passed their Departmental exams. Doctoral students considering a program switch should appropriately plan their first year coursework to ensure the receiving the tuition reduction. The 75% tuition remission is contingent on passing the first year exams at the master’s level. PhD students who take the doctoral exam and then elect, or are asked to switch to, a master’s program will be informed whether their performance on the doctoral exam constitutes a pass at the master’s level. Students who are deemed to have not passed at the master’s level, will be asked to take the master’s Departmental exam in the subsequent year to fulfill the requirements of the master’s program and will not be eligible for the tuition reduction until the exam requirements have been met. Students will be allowed this one administration of the master’s exam in these circumstances.