

# Doctor of Philosophy

## Health Services Research (PhD)

757-683-4259

<http://www.odu.edu/academics/programs/doctoral/health-services-research>  
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Dr. Qi (Harry) Zhang, Graduate Program Director (qzhang@odu.edu)

The primary mission of the Ph.D. in health services research is to develop leaders and problem solvers whose professional services will improve the health of the population not only in Eastern Virginia but also statewide, nationally, and internationally. Health services researchers examine health care quality and effectiveness, primary and managed care, new technologies, and other critical health services and related public health research practice topics. Health services researchers pursue careers in many settings, including academia, industry, professional organizations, research centers, health policy groups, clinical settings, and in federal, state, local, and international agencies.

The goals of the program are to enable students to conduct and interpret health services research, to formulate and analyze public health policy, to lead programs and organizations that address the health care needs of populations and to work directly with community members to empower them to be a part of the policy formulation process. In accomplishing these goals students in the program will develop the critical skills necessary to integrate knowledge and competencies applicable to public health and health services questions and problems. Students will be able to design viable programs, manage resources, and measure the effectiveness of service delivery public health interventions to populations. Students will be awarded the Ph.D. in health services research after the completion of all university and program requirements for graduate degrees.

In addition to demonstrated ability in the health services research competencies, students are expected to select one of two tracks: Applied Health Research or Health Policy and Management Research.

**Applied Health Research** track will provide students with skills needed to address complex health questions across disciplinary boundaries, advance health-related research and programs, prevent disease and injury, and provide innovative approaches or solve practice-related problems in state and federal agencies, private/non-profit research and evaluation agencies, academia, and health systems.

**Health Policy and Management Research** track will provide students with the skills and systems thinking approaches to formulate and implement health policies, evaluate the effectiveness of policies within a health care organization, and improve the management of health delivery performance in state and federal agencies, private/non-profit research and evaluation agencies, academia, and health systems.

## Requirements for Admission

Students are admitted to the Ph.D. program during the fall term only. Applications for admission are reviewed by the Ph.D. in Health Services Research Program admissions committee. To qualify for admission, an applicant must meet the general University admission requirements at the graduate level as well as specific program requirements, including:

1. A completed master's degree from a program that is accredited by a specialized accrediting agency; degrees such as M.D., J.D., and D.D.S. are also acceptable;
2. A minimum acceptable grade point average of 3.50 (on a 4.0 scale) overall for the master's degree;
3. Graduate Record Exam (GRE) not required but strongly recommended;
4. For those whose native language is not English a TOEFL score of at least 550 (79 for internet-based test);
5. Official transcripts from all institutions of higher education attended;

6. A current curriculum vitae or resume;
7. Three letters of reference from sources capable of commenting on the applicant's readiness and commitment for doctoral studies. At least two, and preferably all letters should be from academic sources; other letters must be from professional supervisors;
8. A 1500 word essay discussing the applicant's academic and professional goals. This essay should discuss how the Ph.D. in Health Services Research program will contribute towards meeting these goals; and
9. A personal interview to discuss applicant's research focus and fit with the program faculty's expertise.

Prerequisite courses are necessary for students who do not have graduate preparation in basic statistics, research design, and basic computer literacy. Prerequisite courses in health delivery systems and community health may be required for students without academic preparation or experience in these areas.

All applications are made through the Schools of Public Health Application Service (SOPHAS), the centralized application service for schools and programs of public health.

## Curriculum Requirements

The coursework consists of 12 credits of health services core courses, 18 credits of research core courses, 12 credits of track-specific courses and 2-3 credits of electives. Track options include: Health Administration and Policy (HAP) or Applied Health Research (AHR). A 1-credit colloquium is required each semester along with coursework (4 course series). Additionally, students complete 12 dissertation credits. Up to 9 credit hours of coursework may be at the 600 level. Up to 12 hours of graduate credit may be transferred from another university and applied towards the Ph.D. degree. Transfer of credit is approved at the discretion of the advisory committee and the graduate program director.

## Health Services Research

### The Health Services Research Core

HSR 776	Global Health	3
HSR 801	Introduction to Health Services	3
HSR 809	Multidisciplinary Approaches to Health Services Research	3
HSR 814	Theory in the Health Sciences	3

### Research Core

HSR 810	Research Design and Application	3
HSR 811	Quantitative Research Methods in Health Care	3
HSR 812	Qualitative Research Methods	3
HSR 813	Health Outcomes Research	3
HSR 846	Epidemiology	3
HSR 873	Planning Proposals and Developing Grants in Health Research	3

### Electives\*

HSR 706	Leadership in Complex Systems and Organizations	3
HSR 778	Global Environmental Health	3
HSR 804	Methods of Program Evaluation	3
HSR 805	Interprofessional Study Abroad on Global Health	3

### Track - Select One

#### Applied Health Research Track

HSR 785	Issues and Opportunities in Global Health Research	3
HSR 815	Decision Analysis in Health Care	3
HSR 898	Supervised Research	3
MPHO 712	Applied Biostatistics	3

#### Health Policy and Management Research

HSR 802	Health Management	3
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HSR 864	Health Economics	
HSR 872	Policy and Politics of Health	
HSR 898	Supervised Research	
<b>Colloquium</b>		
HSR 889	Colloquium I	1
HSR 890	Colloquium II	1
HSR 891	Colloquium III	1
HSR 892	Colloquium IV	1
<b>Dissertation</b>		
Complete dissertation requirements		12

\* Other track courses can be used as an elective. Additional electives with approval of Program Director.

## Additional Requirements

### Degree Requirements

1. Satisfactory completion of at least 60 semester hours of graduate level coursework, including all required courses as listed below. (Students who receive two or more grades of C+ or one grade of F may not continue in the program).
2. Two semesters of full-time residency. These do not have to be consecutive.
3. A health services research supervised research experience.
4. Acceptable performance on written and oral candidacy examinations in the major field of study at the end of the program coursework. Students may re-take the candidacy exams only once.
5. Successful defense of a dissertation proposal.
6. Completion of a traditional or three-article dissertation representing the candidate's ability to conduct scholarly, original research. The quality of the research must be suitable for publication in an academic, peer-reviewed journal.
7. Successful oral defense of the dissertation.
8. Submission of the approved final copy of the dissertation.

Time frames for completion of degree requirement are as follows:

1. The entire process (from admission to dissertation defense) must be completed within eight years. Exceptions to this time limit require the approval of the graduate program director, college dean and the dean of the graduate school.
2. Academic credit which is more than eight years old at the time of graduation must be re-validated by an examination before the work can be applied to a doctoral degree.
3. The dissertation must be completed within five years after the candidacy exams are passed.
4. Dissertations should be defended at least six weeks prior to the end of the semester in which the student expects to graduate.

Each student is required to have an identified research mentor who also serves as their advisory faculty member who will meet with the student upon entry into the program. The faculty member, with the graduate program director, approves the student's planned coursework (plan of study) and conducts the written and oral candidacy exams at the end of the coursework. Students must maintain a 3.0 grade point average.

### Candidacy Exams (Written and Oral)

The candidacy examination is normally taken during the spring or fall semester of registration in the last formal graduate credits. Through the candidacy examination, the student's advisory and examination committee in conjunction with the candidacy exam subcommittee and the graduate program director shall ensure that the student has demonstrated a mastery of the subject matter in all fields of the program, has an adequate knowledge of relevant literature, and has the ability to identify, utilize, and apply research skills and techniques. To be eligible to take the examination, the student must meet the program requirements, must have completed or be

in the semester of completing all coursework and the internship, must be recommended by his/her advisory and examination committee, and must achieve at least a 3.0 GPA on all coursework taken within the program. Students need to apply to take the candidacy exam to the graduate program director by the specified deadline each semester. The application form must be submitted by February 10 to take the exam in the spring semester, April 10 to take the exam in the summer, and by September 10 to take the exam in the fall semester.

All parts of the examination are graded pass/fail. Students may retake the exam only once. Parts of the written exam that are not passed on the first attempt need to be re-taken when the exam is offered again. The oral exam can be re-taken in the same semester.

### Dissertation (12 credits)

The candidate's program of study culminates in a dissertation representing an original research project which makes a real and significant contribution to health services knowledge and practice. The dissertation provides a demonstration of the student's ability to conduct independent scholarly research in health services research. The dissertation phase begins only after all other degree requirements (coursework, candidacy exams), have been completed. Towards this end, the candidate must form a dissertation committee, write and successfully defend a dissertation proposal, independently conduct the research necessary to complete the dissertation, write the dissertation, successfully defend the dissertation at an oral defense, make any necessary changes based on the committee's recommendation and submit a final approved copy to the dean's office. Additionally, all Ph.D. students are strongly encouraged to prepare as first author at least one journal article based upon their dissertation research prior to graduation.

### Dissertation Committee

After the candidacy exams are successfully passed, the dissertation committee is formed by the student in conjunction with, and approval by, the student's faculty advisor and the graduate program director. A dissertation committee must have at least three members, one of whom is from outside the department of the major field of study. The members of the dissertation committee must all hold doctorates and be graduate certified unless an exception first has been approved by the graduate program director, college dean, and appropriate VP. The committee's purpose is to supervise the entire process from proposal writing and defense through the oral defense of the dissertation. The faculty mentor supervises and approves the choosing of a topic, the choosing of a theoretical framework, the development of the research methods, the actual conduct of the research and the writing of the results. For either dissertation (traditional or three article) the dissertation committee may not be officially formed until: (1) all coursework is completed; and (2) the candidacy examination has been successfully completed.

### Dissertation Proposal

The dissertation proposal topic selected shall represent a major research project/area which focuses on an issue directly related to health services research and may be multidisciplinary in approach. The traditional dissertation proposal consists of the first three chapters of the dissertation in their entirety, while the Three Article Dissertation consists of Chapters 1 and 2 and any subsequent "article" written as part of the three article dissertation.

The dissertation proposal provides a detailed explanation of the research being proposed, and should address the significance of the study, provide a substantive literature review or systematic review, and describe, in detail, the methods that will be used to collect data. The proposal will be defended in a public forum to which are invited all faculty, staff and students in the college. The final draft of the dissertation proposal must be available for public viewing two weeks before the defense date. No formal work should begin on the dissertation until a majority of dissertation committee members and graduate program director approve the dissertation proposal in writing.

Dissertation proposals can be defended prior to IRB approval/exemption. However, no data collection or interaction with study participants can ever begin until the dissertation chair and the student have obtained IRB approval or exemption. Approval of the dissertation proposal is NOT a pro forma activity and the student is cautioned never to regard it as such.

## Dissertation and Final Oral Defense

The completion of a dissertation is the cornerstone of the Ph.D. program. Through the dissertation, candidates demonstrate that they are prepared to join the company of scholars and to be leaders in health services research. The candidate should work closely with his/her dissertation committee throughout this process. Dissertations must be carefully prepared, publicly available for viewing, defended in a public forum and approved by the dissertation committee, the graduate program director, and the college dean.

The dissertation committee plays a vital role in the completion of the dissertation. Candidates are expected to be in regular communication with the committee chair and members regarding the progress of the study, research results and manuscript drafts. While preparing a dissertation, candidates must be continuously enrolled for a minimum of one credit hour per semester. University resources may not be used unless a candidate is officially enrolled. Advice or assistance from committee members should not be expected unless the candidate is officially enrolled.

Dissertations must be carefully prepared according to ODU guidelines using the most current version of the Guide for the Preparation of Theses and Dissertations (obtained from The Graduate School). The APA style manual should be used to cover specific questions of style. However, the requirements of the Guide for the Preparation of Theses and Dissertations take precedence over all the guidelines contained in the APA manual. All proposed dissertation research which involves human subjects must be reviewed and approved by the college or University's Human Subjects Committee. The process and approval must be documented in the text of the dissertation. Once the dissertation is successfully defended and in its final form, the student will upload the document to ProQuest.

Once the dissertation committee approves that the dissertation is ready, the student works with the dissertation committee to set a defense date and to ensure that the defense date is made public. The student should provide sufficient copies of the dissertation for public viewing at least two weeks before the defense date. The defense itself needs to be publicized two weeks in advance as well. While the defense is publicized and open to the public in general, care should be taken to ensure that all college faculty and administrators and all departmental students receive invitations to the defense. The entire dissertation committee must attend the final oral dissertation defense. After the dissertation defense, the dissertation committee meets in a closed-door meeting to discuss the dissertation defense and to vote on its approval or disapproval. If the dissertation is not approved, it can be defended only once more (no sooner than three months after the initial defense). The final dissertation must be approved through a signature process that includes the dissertation chair, all members of the dissertation committee, the graduate program director and the dean of the College of Health Sciences. Note that a dissertation may be approved orally at the final defense, but the committee may require some changes before the final copy is approved. Final approval of the written document is the responsibility of the associate dean of the college. The Doctor of Philosophy in Health Services Research will be awarded upon the oral defense of the dissertation, the submission of the final approved copy of the dissertation and the completion of all other program requirements for graduation.