

Guidelines for Students and Supervisors

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this document please contact the Public Health Program Director at uc.public.health.director@utoronto.ca, or the Program Assistant, Office of Academic Services University College, Room 173, 15 King's College Circle, Toronto, Ontario, M5S 3H7
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Introduction

The Public Health Program at University College in the University of Toronto is a multidisciplinary undergraduate program that explores the determinants of health and health care. One fundamental aspect of the Public Health Program is its strong emphasis on research.

The purpose of the research component of the Public Health Program is to allow students to contribute to the intellectual milieu of the University by performing research as novice academics. This research experience has many benefits for students: it gives them a better understanding of how research actually works; a chance to work closely with and be mentored directly by faculty; and experience that is an excellent preparation both professionally and for future graduate study. Involvement in research can also help sharpen critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and can improve confidence and self-direction; a research course is an excellent complement to traditional course work.

Public Health Independent Research Courses (PHS451Y1 & PHS480H1)



Course Descriptions

Public Health students have an opportunity to carry out their research projects in the following fourth year courses: **PHS451Y1** and **PHS480H1**.

Course Code	Course Name	Full or Half Year?	Prerequisites	Exclusions	Available for
PHS451Y1	Independent Research in Public Health	Full (1.0 FCE)	PHS209H1, PHS250H1	UNI451Y1	Majors
PHS480H1	Independent Research in Public Health	Half (0.5 FCE, fall or spring)	PHS209H1, PHS250H1	UNI480H1	Majors

Types of Research Activities

Due to the multidisciplinary nature of the Public Health Program, students can pursue research on a broad range of topics using a variety of methods including quantitative, qualitative, and community-based approaches.

Many students use this research opportunity to prepare a thesis as their final output, or a paper for publication. In some cases, students and supervisors may jointly decide that a public report, a program evaluation, or some other type of content would be more appropriate. The nature of the outputs of the research should be decided collaboratively between the student and their supervisor, based on what is most appropriate for the research question, most appropriate for the end users of the research, and most valuable for the student and supervisor. Students and supervisors should, however, be sure that the research course results in at least one substantive piece of work primarily authored by the student.

Setting Up Research Projects in the Public Health Program

Students are responsible for finding an appropriate supervisor. The supervisor must be a faculty member with an appointment in an academic unit at the University of Toronto. (NB - sessional instructors are not eligible to supervise independent study courses unless they hold an appointment in a U of T academic unit, but may be eligible to supervise a PHS400Y1 Practicum course – please see the *Practicum Guide* at <http://www.uc.utoronto.ca/public-health-courses> for details).

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The student and supervisor will collaboratively determine the research project and the project outputs. (Students will be guided on how to find a supervisor and setting up their projects in **PHS350Y1**).

Students can pursue research projects in two ways:

1. **Student-initiated projects:** Students have their own vision and plan for a research project. In this case, the student finds a supervisor who can help them to refine their project and mentor their research.
2. **Supervisor-initiated projects:** Students find supervisors with ongoing research projects where the student can contribute to a part of the project. In this case, the supervisor and student work together to define which piece(s) of the ongoing project that the student will take on. There may also be room for the student to contribute to work that was not initially in the supervisor's plan, if the supervisor and student find ways to better integrate the student's interests or learning goals.

(Please note: Students cannot be paid and receive course credit for their research project.)

Registration Instructions

Once students have identified a supervisor and a research project, students are expected to have an initial meeting with their supervisor. During this meeting the student and supervisor should review this guideline package together and fill out and sign the *Public Health Program Independent Research Course Proposal*. This can be found online at: <http://www.uc.utoronto.ca/public-health-courses>.

The student, supervisor and the Public Health Program Director must all sign off on the Course Proposal; the student will not be enrolled in the course until it has been approved by Public Health. Once the form is completed and signed, it can be submitted to uc.academicservices@utoronto.ca AND uc.public.health.director@utoronto.ca or a hard copy to the Office of Academic Services (UC 173). Students will then be enrolled in the course by the Program Assistant.

Complete submissions should be made no later than the end of the second week of classes in a Fall or Winter term or first week of classes in a Summer Term.

Student Responsibilities

It is the student's responsibility to find a research supervisor and to work with the supervisor to define the research project. PHS350Y1 (prerequisite for PHS451Y1) is designed to aid in this process and is strongly recommended as preparation for all independent research courses. The Public Health Director is also available for meetings to assist with connecting students to potential supervisors.

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Students are expected to spend approximately 8 hours per week (each week of classes, over the course of the entire academic year) on their research project. It is understood that this time will vary depending on the project as well as on other academic demands over the course of the year. It is recommended that students meet with their supervisors at least once per month; given supervisors' busy schedules, students may need to remind their supervisors to ensure these meetings take place, and should also contact their supervisor should additional meetings be needed.

Students also agree to attend all formal and informal sessions related to the research courses, for example: occasional seminars and workshops recommended by their supervisor, "work in progress" meetings with a research team, and presentation practice sessions. All PHS research course students also commit to participating in the Public Health Research Symposium and the University College Poster Fair held at the end of the academic year (it is therefore encouraged that students and supervisors make these outputs part of the formal evaluation for the course). Students should also be sure to invite their supervisors to attend their research presentations.

Students undertaking Public Health research courses further agree to abide by the terms of study and research in Arts & Science, including expectations around academic integrity (see <http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/osai/The-rules>) and research ethics (see <http://www.research.utoronto.ca/faculty-and-staff/research-ethics-and-protections/> and <http://www.research.utoronto.ca/faculty-and-staff/research-ethics-and-protections/ethical-conduct/>). In particular, student work must be rigorous and accurately presented, others' work should be appropriately acknowledged and cited, and research involving human participants must be reviewed by the appropriate research ethics board prior to being undertaken.

Finally, students who participate in a research course are also committing to evaluating their supervisory relationship on an ongoing basis (more information on this below) and to make the Public Health Director aware of any concerns about their progress in the course as soon as possible.

Supervisor Responsibilities

Supervisors must meet with their student(s) before the course begins, to define the research project and to establish the research goals, work-plan and timeline, meeting schedule, research outputs, and evaluation plan. As described above, research projects may be student-initiated or supervisor-initiated, but must include at least one substantive research output that is primarily the student's own work.

Supervisors are expected to meet with students at least once per month over the course of the research course. More frequent meetings may be necessary at key points in the research process (for example, in the early months of the project to build a work-plan and to ensure the student is confident with proceeding independently, or near the end of the

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project to discuss revisions and support the student in presentation and poster development). The general timetable for meetings should be described on the course proposal form. Supervisors should also commit to providing substantive, timely feedback on assignments and drafts (as agreed with the student, but generally not more than two weeks from the due date, and less for material such as drafts where comments must be integrated into future work), and to providing final course grades on the *Final Evaluation Form* by the Arts and Science deadline (generally the last day of classes).

Supervisors should provide the student with grades based on the Arts & Science grading policy (see below), and be prepared to hold their students to the expectations set by the University of Toronto in terms of academic integrity and research ethics (in particular, in terms of appropriately citing work and the requirement for research ethics review of research with human subjects). The supervisor should also fill out a *Progress Report* and *Final Evaluation Form* jointly with the student (more information below). Supervisors should feel free to contact the Program Director directly about any problems in the course or with student progress as soon as they are identified.

Supervisors are always welcome and are encouraged to participate in any events of the Public Health Program; in particular, it is important that they plan to attend the annual Research Symposium and University College Poster Fair at the end of the academic year, where students will formally present their work.

Public Health Program Responsibilities

The Director of the Public Health Program is available to discuss research projects with supervisors and students prior to the submission of the *Public Health Program Independent Research Course Proposal*. The Public Health Director will review all submitted forms and will provide feedback to both students and supervisors in terms of the research plan and timeline when appropriate.

The Program Director is also available to mediate disputes between the student researcher and supervisor should they arise, and will review the *Progress Report* and *Final Evaluation Form* and will submit a final course grade to ROSI on this basis.

Evaluating Student Performance

Evaluation of student work in a Public Health Independent Research Course is not pre-determined, but is set by the supervisor and student jointly at the beginning of the course (i.e., on the *Independent Research Course Proposal* form). Student and supervisors should use the *Course Proposal* form to develop and formalize an evaluation plan for the course. In so doing, they should ensure that the outputs correspond with both the supervisor and student's goals, and that there is an appropriate project timeline and workload. In particular, they should be conscious of Arts and Science key deadlines (i.e., the last day to drop a course and the final day to submit marks for a course without an

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examination, generally the last day of classes). The components of the evaluation (for example, pieces of work to be submitted, or marks for participation) should be clearly described and due dates should be assigned (after which a late penalty will apply). Because there is flexibility in the types of work being undertaken in an independent research project, it is important that the student and supervisor both have a clear understanding of what work is being undertaken for credit, how it will be evaluated, and what the penalties are for failing to complete that work. If both student and supervisor prefer, initial drafts of outputs need not count for course credit, and the number and type of outputs are negotiable – however, it is important that students are able to receive feedback on their work prior to the penultimate due date, and so these deadlines should be worked into the course schedule where possible in order to establish clear expectations on both sides in terms of turnaround time. Ultimately, this evaluation plan will be used by the Supervisor to grade the student’s work.

An example evaluation plan is provided on the page following.

Example Evaluation Plan

Assignment description	Approximate length	% of grade	Due date
<p><i>Literature review</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summarizes existing literature on topic, including... Clearly identifies the gap that the proposed research will fill 	10-15 pages (NB – all double-spaced)	10%	October 5
<p><i>First draft of “Undergraduate Ethics Review Protocol Form – Student-Initiated Projects”</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Form available at http://www.research.utoronto.ca/forms/ Describes research background, purpose and objectives, methods, participant recruitment, etc. Includes informed consent form and interview guide 	10-20 pages including form and appendices	5%	October 25 (feedback from supervisor by October 30)
<p><i>Final draft of Ethics Form</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Includes all changes suggested by supervisor to original draft (note that this could involve multiple rounds of revision) 	Same as above	10%	November 5
<p><i>Summary of progress to date</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explain what has been done, challenges, what still needs to be completed Could include rough draft of methods section, preliminary results/interpretation, summary tables and/or charts 	As needed	5%	January 20
<p><i>First draft of manuscript for academic journal</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Includes introduction, literature review, research objectives, description of methods, results, discussion of the implications, and conclusion Text can be reused from previous assignments (e.g., literature review, ethics protocol) 	20-30 pages	10%	February 10
<p><i>HS Research Symposium practice presentation and draft poster review</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Both outputs summarize key sections of manuscript Should be well-organized, clear, visually appealing 	10-15 slides plus poster	10%	March 10
<p><i>Public Health Research Symposium presentation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incorporates feedback from practice presentation 	20 minutes	10%	March 15 (3-5 pm)
<p><i>University College Poster Fair</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incorporates feedback on draft Include both poster and responses to questions 	As per UC Poster Fair instructions	10%	March 15 (9 am-2 pm)
<p><i>2nd draft of manuscript for academic journal</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incorporates feedback from original report, as well as from presentation and poster fair 	As per journal instructions	20%	March 1
<p><i>Participation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attendance at meetings, ongoing communication (to update, ask for help, etc.) 	N/A	10%	Throughout course

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Supervisors should provide a number grade on each assignment laid out in the plan. Grades in Arts and Science are based on the following rubric:

Percentage	Letter Grade	Grade Point Value	Grade Definition	
90-100	A+	4.0	Excellent	Strong evidence of original thinking; good organization; capacity to analyze and synthesize; superior grasp of subject matter with sound critical evaluations; evidence of extensive knowledge base.
85-89	A	4.0		
80-84	A-	3.7		
77-79	B+	3.3	Good	Evidence of grasp of subject matter, some evidence of critical capacity and analytic ability; reasonable understanding of relevant issues; evidence of familiarity with literature
73-76	B	3.0		
70-72	B-	2.7		
67-69	C+	2.3	Adequate	Student who is profiting from the university experience; understanding of the subject matter and ability to develop solutions to simple problems in the material.
63-66	C	2.0		
60-62	C-	1.7		
57-59	D+	1.3	Marginal	Some evidence of familiarity with the subject matter and some evidence that critical and analytic skills have been developed.
53-56	D	1.0		
50-52	D-	0.7		
0-49	F	0.0	Inadequate	Little evidence of even superficial understanding of subject matter; weakness in critical and analytic skills; limited or irrelevant use of literature.

Supervisors should provide students with grades on their assignments as soon as possible after they have been submitted (within two weeks wherever possible; in any case, times for feedback should be taken into account in the Evaluation Plan).

Progress Report and Final Evaluation Forms

At least twice during the course (once prior to the Arts and Science deadline to drop the course, and once as the course is drawing to a close), the supervisor and student should discuss the performance of both the student and supervisor. At that point, both student and supervisor are required to fill out a *Progress Report* (form available at <http://www.uc.utoronto.ca/health-studies-courses>, so that students can receive support, if needed, early in the project. Another mandatory evaluation will take place at the end of the project. The final evaluations will be guided by the *Final Evaluation Form*, which will be submitted to the Office of Academic Services at University College. On the agreement form, there is space for the student and supervisor to decide on the dates for the progress report(s) and the end of project evaluation conversations. (Please consult the

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University Course Calendar to ensure there is at least one progress report conversation scheduled before the Add/Drop date.)

These forms can be found on the Public Health website:

<http://www.uc.utoronto.ca/public-health-courses>. If the Supervisor needs support in determining how to grade students, or if support is needed in dealing with conflicts with students, they are welcome to contact the Public Health Director.

Progress Report

Every student and supervisor must turn in at least one *Progress Report* form before the last day to drop a course without penalty in Arts and Science. The *Progress Report* should be submitted by email to the Public Health Program Director (uc.public.health.director@utoronto.ca) AND uc.academicservices@utoronto.ca by this deadline.

Each progress report has two parts:

1. Grades to date and current assessment from the supervisor.
2. A summary of issues that arise in the conversation between the supervisor and student around the project, and recommended improvements that can be made in terms of both student and supervisor actions.

The Progress Report is a chance for conversation around improving the placement for both the supervisor and the student. Supervisors and students must meet to discuss the Progress Report's content before it is submitted to ensure that any issues and improvements are discussed.

Final Evaluation Form

Every student and supervisor must turn in a Final Evaluation. All Final Evaluations should be submitted by email to the Public Health Program Director (uc.public.health.director@utoronto.ca) AND uc.academicservices@utoronto.ca by the last day of classes

Each Final Evaluation has two parts:

1. Final grades and assessment from the supervisor.
2. Feedback from the supervisor about the research experience and any suggestions for future students and supervisors that can be integrated into the Public Health independent research courses.

Using the Evaluation Plan, supervisors will provide a final grade for each assignment (including those submitted on the Progress Report) and will allocate a final grade for the course. This grade will then be entered onto ROSI by the Program Assistant once the Program Director has approved the Final Evaluation.

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Deadlines

All of these forms can be found on the Public Health website:

<http://www.uc.utoronto.ca/public-health-courses>. All forms must be submitted by email to the Public Health Program Director (uc.public.health.director@utoronto.ca) AND uc.academicsservices@utoronto.ca by the deadlines listed below.

FORM	DEADLINE
Public Health Independent Research Course Proposal, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of proposed research • Evaluation plan • Signatures of student, supervisor and Program Director 	Second week of classes in September for Y courses and Fall H courses. Second week of classes in January for Winter H courses. First week of classes in Summer F or S term.
Student Progress Report*	Before the final day to drop the course
Supervisor Progress Report*	Before the final day to drop the course
Student Final Evaluation Form	Last day of classes
Supervisor Final Evaluation Form	Last day of classes

Note: You may choose to submit more than one round of Progress Reports, but all students and supervisors are required to submit **at least one Progress Report before the final course drop date.*

Additional Resources

Writing Support

The University offers 14 writing centers to provide individual consultations with trained writing instructors, free of charge. Students can seek help at the University College Writing Centre or the writing centre at the college they are registered at. Students are urged to book their appointments early, as there is limited space that fills up fast.

University College Writing Centre:

<http://uc.utoronto.ca/writing-centre>

Faculty of Arts and Science Writing Centres:

<http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/writing-centres>

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Statistics and Data Analysis Support

The Department of Statistical Sciences at the University of Toronto offers free one-hour consultations with experienced statistical consultants. Students are encouraged to book their appointments early, as spots are limited. <https://datasciences.utoronto.ca/datasciences-cafe/>

FAQs for Students

Am I eligible to take a Public Health Independent Research Course?

Only students enrolled in the Public Health program of study are eligible to take PHS451Y1 and PHS480H1. For all course details please see “Course Descriptions” above.

How do I enroll in a Public Health Independent Research Course?

Course enrolment is done by the Program Office once the *Research Course Proposal* has been completed and signed by the student, supervisor, and Program Director. Students cannot register in this course through ROSI. To complete registration, you must find a supervisor, complete the Proposal form and return it to the programs office by the deadline. See “Registration Instructions” above.

When should I enroll in a Public Health Independent Research Course?

You can begin the enrolment process as soon as you have found a supervisor – the Program Office can process your registration any time before the deadline (second week of September). In order to find an appropriate supervisor and get the paperwork filled out, students should begin the process as early in the summer as possible.

Can I take PHS480H1 (half year course) twice and continue the same project in the second term?

No. You must complete your project in the one semester that you take PHS480H1. If your project will require longer than one term to complete, you should consider enrolling in PHS451Y1Y.

I would like to do a research project, but my potential supervisor is not appointed at the University of Toronto. What should I do?

Public Health offers a fourth year practicum course (PHS400Y1) where there is an option to conduct a research project with a supervisor external from the University. Please see the Public Health Practicum Course Guidelines for more details: <http://www.uc.utoronto.ca/health-studies-courses>.

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Do I need to get Research Ethics Board approval for my research project?

If you are conducting research with human participants your supervisor should already have approval from their Research Ethics Board to conduct the research. If they do not, and this is a student-initiated project, you can begin the process to seek ethics approval. See this website. Caution: projects that seek ethics approval may not get approved in a timely fashion, this can put your project behind considerably. Please exercise extreme caution when choosing a project in which ethics remains to be approved. See - <https://research.utoronto.ca/ethics-human-research/ethics-review-course-based-research>

My supervisor and I are having trouble agreeing. What should I do?

You should aim to communicate your goals for the project in the initial research proposal, which will stand as a binding agreement between you, your supervisor and Public Health. Once the project has begun, differences of opinion can happen – it is best to try and meet in person with your supervisor to discuss your concerns. Remember, your supervisor has previous research experience and you should take their advice (particularly about project relevance, scope, timelines, and workload) if at all possible. If your attempts to resolve the situation are unsuccessful, you can bring it to the attention of the Public Health Director, who will work to resolve the situation.

The last date to drop the course is approaching and I still haven't received a mark in the course. What should I do?

Please remind your supervisor as the drop date approaches if you haven't received a mark in the course. If these attempts are unsuccessful, please contact the Programs Office or the Public Health Director for guidance.