

SSPH+ PhD Program in Public Health

Guidelines and Minimal Standards

SSPH+ PhD Program in Public Health
Administrative Office
Swiss Tropical- and Public Health Institute
Socinstrasse 57
CH – 4002 Basel
phdph@sspplus.ch
Tel +41 61 284 83 08
Fax +41 61 284 81 05

1	What is the SSPH+ PhD program?	3
2	Why should students register with the SSPH+ PhD program?....	3
3	Requirements for Registration with the SSPH+ PhD program	4
4	Minimal Standards.....	4
4.1	Doctoral committee	4
4.2	Training	5
4.3	Competences in Public Health.....	5
4.3.1	Fundamentals of Public Health.....	5
4.3.2	Research skills	6
4.3.3	Personal and management skills	6
4.4	Portfolio	6
4.5	Thesis.....	7
5	Certificate	7
6	Forms	8
7	Registration Form	9
8	Student's Self-Assessment Form.....	11
9	Annual Meeting Confirmation Form	13
10	Certificate Form	14

1 What is the SSPH+ PhD program?

The SSPH+ PhD program

- is a **training and networking** program designed for PhD students in the fields of Public Health. It offers courses comprising basic skills in public health research, advanced methods courses, and thematic workshops. Courses are taught by national and international experts and aim to provide high level education for PhD students:

http://www.ispm-unibasel.ch/ssphplus/spip.php?page=phd_courses&lang=en

- it defines **minimal standards** to be met by the students in order to register with the program and to receive a certificate of SSPH+ at the end of their studies.
- it structures the learning experience of the students using a **portfolio** that guides both students and supervisors with regard to the skills and competences that need development and facilitates regular assessment of progress.

The PhD degrees are awarded by the different Swiss Universities and by the Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) according to their regulations. SSPH+ does not award a PhD degree but coordinates training and networking.

2 Why should students register with the SSPH+ PhD program?

- The national program offers **networking** opportunities with other PhD students and a **broader Public Health perspective** of the accompanying training SSPH+ students can attend the **PhD courses** and the winter and summer school courses of the SSPH+ program **for free**: http://www.ispm-unibasel.ch/ssphplus/spip.php?page=phd_courses&lang=en.
- The PhD program does not offer a comprehensive program covering all aspects of Public Health as other courses exist within SSPH+ and internationally. Thus
- SSPH+ students can get some financial support to attend external courses: http://www.ispm-unibasel.ch/ssphplus/spip.php?page=phd_main&lang=en&id_rubrique=6.
- SSPH+ students profit from a **structured learning process** during their PhD studies.
- SSPH+ students are regularly informed about **upcoming events** in Public Health

3 Requirements for Registration with the SSPH+ PhD program

- (1) The student needs to be accepted as a PhD student/candidate by a qualified supervisor at one of the Swiss university or ETH. PhD opportunities in Public Health / Epidemiology in Switzerland are still developing and the specific regulations differ between universities. Information about specific programs or contact persons can be found under the following link:

http://www.ispm-unibasel.ch/ssphplus/spip.php?page=phd_main&lang=en&id_rubrique=5.

- (2) In addition to being accepted as a PhD student at a Swiss University or ETH the student has to submit an abstract of about 250 words describing the research project and outlining the Public Health relevance of the research topic.
- (3) The PhD student and the supervisor confirm that they accept the Minimal Standards and they define the necessary amount of accompanying training as outlined in the minimal standards.
- (4) A doctoral committee has to be formed as outlined in the Minimal Standards



4 Minimal Standards

Public Health is an interdisciplinary field attracting students from many different backgrounds to enrol for doctoral studies. It is thus important to define minimal standards that need to be fulfilled in order to be accepted as a student of the program and to receive a certificate at the end of the PhD studies.

PhD studies in Public Health are mainly research centred. In general, they last three years (full time) and are accompanied by training in related fields. The program defines competences in Public Health that need to be acquired which go beyond the specific research skills necessary to successfully accomplish a given research project.

4.1 Doctoral committee

The student should be guided by a doctoral committee consisting of the thesis supervisors and at least 2 other members. The composition of the committee may vary according to local University requirements. The committee will discuss training requirements together with the student, carry out the first year assessment and discuss the progress of the PhD project with the student annually.

4.2 Training

- Students may have a master's degree in medicine, psychology, sociology, environmental science, sports science, and many others. Without additional training in Public Health their level of knowledge is not sufficient to successfully perform research in Public Health.
- In general, 12 ETCS of formal training is required for PhD students according to University regulations. Yet, for students with a University master's degree (e.g. in medicine, sociology, psychology) and **no** additional training in Public Health a minimum of 25 ETCS additional training is required.
- This amount of additional training necessary for students of the SSPH+ PhD program has been harmonized with the minimal standards of Swiss MD-PhD program (thus allowing PhD students in Public Health with a medical background to apply for MD-PhD scholarships: <http://www.samw.ch/de/Forschung/MD-PhD-Programm.html>).
- The necessary additional training needs to be assessed by the doctoral committee before starting the PhD studies. As some PhD students may already be trained in Public Health (e.g. as part of an MPH or Epidemiology program in Switzerland or abroad) the assessment needs to be done on an individual basis and the amount of required training (in total) has to be indicated on the registration form. Without additional training beyond a University master the default is 25 + 12 ETCS.

4.3 Competences in Public Health

4.3.1 Fundamentals of Public Health

PhD students in Public Health need to become experts in their specific field of research while simultaneously becoming familiar with fundamental concepts of Public Health. This includes fundamentals of

- Epidemiology
(Determinants of health and illness, epidemiological study designs, sources of error and bias, risk factor concepts, statistical concepts to analyze and interpret data etc.)
- Social and behavioral science in health research
(Addressing inequities in health, psychosocial factors affecting health behavior, strategies for health promotion and prevention)
- Health system research
(Effectiveness, efficiency and equity of health care systems, outcome research, basic knowledge of health economics and health policy)

It is not possible to acquire in depth knowledge in all these areas of Public Health during the PhD studies. The accompanying studies should thus provide specialist knowledge in one of these fields (the area of the research project) and basic knowledge in the other two areas.

4.3.2 Research skills

Students need to be

- well trained in general research skills such as paper writing, grant applications and dealing with ethical issues and to acquire advanced methodological skills in their area of research.
- able to pose innovative and important research questions, informed by systematic reviews of the literature, stakeholder needs, and relevant theoretical and conceptual models and to select an appropriate interventional or observational study design to address the research question.
- able to work in a multi-disciplinary team, ensure the ethical and responsible conduct of research and to effectively communicate the findings and implications of their research to technical and lay audiences (through multiple modalities such as scientific writing, presentations, teaching)
- able to show the policy implications of their own research and to translate these implications to a broader audience

4.3.3 Personal and management skills

Many practical skills are normally acquired during the research work. It should be made sure that the student can gradually take over more qualified tasks related to project management and leadership and thus develop these skills.

4.4 Portfolio

- All SSPH+ PhD students maintain a portfolio which documents the learning progress
- The learning experience of the student is structured by regular meetings with the doctoral committee (at least annually) where progress is evaluated based on the student's self-assessment and new targets are set against the competences that need to be acquired. After the first phase of doctoral studies (usually 12 months) a formal decision about continuation of the PhD studies is taken. The student is responsible to organize the annual meetings of the committee.
- The student's self-assessment documents and reflects which experiences improved his/her competence to conduct research in his/her specific research area, how broader Public Health competences could be acquired, how personal and soft skills could be developed and how management and leadership competences could be improved. Gaps are identified and a working plan for the following year is developed. The documented learning experience goes beyond the documentation of formal training.

→

Student's Self-Assessment **Form**

4.5 Thesis

In accordance with the university regulations the thesis will usually consist of 3-5 peer-reviewed articles and include an introduction, literature review, discussion and conclusion section (three first-authored articles are recommended, one is mandatory). At least two peer-reviewed articles must be accepted for the SSPH+ Certificate to be handed out.

5 Certificate

All PhD students who have completed their studies according to the Minimal Standards and have documented their study progress on the *portfolio forms*:

Student's Self-Assessment **Form** will receive a certificate of SSPH+ upon completion of the Certificate Form.

6 Forms

- Registration
- Portfolio Documents:
 - *Student's Self-Assessment*
 - *Annual Meeting Confirmation*
- Certificate

Registration Form

PhD Student: _____

Date (JJ/MM/DD): _____

1) PhD Thesis - Abstract:

Maximum 250 words.

2) PhD Committee:

Supervisor: _____

Committee Members: _____

3) Training:

Based on the assessment of the student's preexisting knowledge in Public Health the doctoral committee and the student agree that a total of **xx** ECTS need to be acquired during the PhD studies (the default being 25 + 12 ECTS).

4) Acceptance of Minimal Standards

The PhD candidate and the responsible PhD supervisor agree that the PhD studies will be performed in accordance with the SSPH+ PhD Program Public Health guidelines and minimal standards.

Signature student: _____

Date: _____

Signature supervisor: _____

Date: _____

Portfolio Documents

- Student's Self Assessment Form to document progress as a basis for the annual meeting of the doctoral committee
- Annual Meeting Confirmation Form to be sent to the SSPH+ PhD program coordination center in Basel after the annual meeting of the doctoral committee.

Student's Self-Assessment

The student's self-assessment documents and reflects which experiences improved his/her competence to conduct research in his/her specific research area, how broader Public Health competences could be acquired, how personal and soft skills could be developed and how management and leadership competences could be improved. Gaps are identified and a working plan for the following year is developed.

A completed fictitious self-assessment form can be downloaded from the program homepage as an Example.

It also lists the ECTS obtained through formal training or other means of study, the attended conferences, presentations, publications and teaching experiences in order to keep track of the individual qualifications. This list is updated annually and discussed with the doctoral committee.

If ECTS are acquired by means of studies other than formal training such as self-study, book clubs etc. the respective supervisor has to confirm the amount of time spent for this activity and a performance record (Leistungsnachweis) has to be defined. One ECTS corresponds to 25-30 hours of student's work.

The student's annual self-assessment provides the basis of the discussion with the doctoral committee at the annual meeting. The Self-assessment form stays with the student.

Student's Self-Assessment **Form**

Annual Meeting Confirmation

At the annual meeting the confirmation form is completed and sent to the SSPH+ PhD program coordination center in Basel.

After the first period of study (usually first year assessment) the doctoral committee decides with the student about the continuation of the PhD study and documents it on the confirmation form.

Annual Meeting Confirmation **Form**

Student's Self-Assessment Form

Which experiences improved your competencies to conduct research in your specific area of study?

How could you acquire broader Public Health competencies?

Which personal competencies and soft skills could you develop?

Which experience improved your management and leadership skills?

Which gaps did you identify and which additional competencies do you need to acquire during the next reporting period?

Set up a working plan and time lines for the next year.

List of Doctoral Training

Course / Workshop	Location	Date	ECTS

List of attended Conferences / Seminars

Conference / Seminar	Location	Date

List of Presentations, Talks, Journal Clubs

Talk/Poster/Journal Club	Location	Date

List of submitted or published Papers / Reviews Articles

Title / Authors	Status (submitted, accepted, published)

List of Teaching Activities by the PhD Student

Teaching / Training	No of Students	Date/Location

Annual Meeting Confirmation Form

The doctoral committee and the student have met for theirannual meeting and discussed the progress of the PhD study based on the student’s self-assessment.

Date of the annual meeting: dd . mm . yyyy

Name of doctoral student: _____

Name of supervisor: _____

Name of other member(s) of the doctoral committee present at the annual meeting: _____

At the first meeting of the doctoral committee it has been agreed with the student to continue/discontinue the PhD study

Signature student:

Signature supervisor:

Certificate Form

1. Title of your thesis:
2. Examination result / grade:
3. List of all ECTS received during your PhD studies
4. Publication list related to your PhD studies. Please declare the status of your publication (submitted, accepted, published including journal, edition, pages)
5. List of presentations in seminar and inter-/national conferences. Please list also the title of your talk, date and place / event.
6. List of teaching