SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH
PUBLIC HEALTH SCIENCE

Student Guide: PHSC389 Research for Credit

Not sure where to start? PHSC389 offers Public Health Science (PHSC) students the chance to earn academic credit through experiential learning in the field of Public Health. This comprehensive two-part guide will help you navigate the process of enrolling in PHSC389, fulfilling all requirements, and finding a suitable research opportunity. Whether you're looking to fulfill your PHSC options requirement or seeking practical experience, this guide has you covered.

Part 1: Earning Academic Credit for Your Research

How to Earn PHSC Research Credit

1. **Find and secure a relevant research experience**
    - Identify and secure a research independent study clearly related to Public Health.
    - Ensure the research provides practical hands-on experience aligned with your goals.
2. **Submit the Pre-Approval Request Form**
    - Complete the pre-approval request form by the deadline to obtain approval from the PHSC program in advance of your start date.
3. **Obtain Research Approval**
    - The PHSC program will review your submitted documentation and speak with your listed supervisor to verify the research details.
    - Within 2 weeks, you will hear from the PHSC program and receive official approval (or additional information needed).
4. **Enroll in PHSC's Research Course**
    - Enroll in PHSC389 for the number of credits you were approved for.
    - Ensure all registration requirements are met, especially the UMD policy on the maximum number of credits per semester.
5. **Fulfill Research Duties and Course Requirements**
    - Fulfill the research hours as specified by the program.
    - Complete all course assignments and evaluations to receive academic credit.

Research Credit Requirements

- **Duration and Hours**: Researchers must meet the minimum required hours specified in the chart and follow the University semester schedule.
- **Supervision**: You must be supervised by a professional in the field who can provide adequate guidance and mentorship. Regular communication and check-ins are required.
- **Learning Objectives**: Researchers should have clearly defined learning objectives that align with the PHSC curriculum, the field of public health, and your academic and career goals.
- **Projects & Tasks:** Your scope of work must be significantly complex to warrant upper-level academic credit with clearly articulated deliverables. Projects and tasks must involve individual contributions and active participation to the research mission.

Important Deadlines and Timeline

You can earn credit for your research three times a year, aligned with the UMD academic calendar.

- Spring: late January - May (deadline January 15)
- Summer: late May - August (deadline May 15)
- Fall: late August - December (deadline August 15)

Research agreements must be finalized before the semester starts.

Criteria for Research Approval

**In order for any research to be approved for PHSC credit, the following criteria must be met.*

Scope of Work Requirements

- ☐ Clearly related to public health.
- ☐ Learning outcomes are aligned with the PHSC program competencies.
- ☐ Significant complexity with minimal clerical tasks.
- ☐ Delineated tasks and projects with tangible deliverables.
- ☐ Learning opportunities use different skills and tools.
- ☐ Primarily active learning, not shadowing or observation.
- ☐ New learning, not tasks you have previously performed.
- ☐ Can be in-person, remote, or hybrid.

Supervisor Eligibility

The Supervisor should:

- ☐ Hold a Bachelor's degree or higher.
- ☐ Offer weekly check-ins, direction, and feedback (virtual or on-site).
- ☐ Provide regular and consistent work hours to meet minimum requirements.
- ☐ Sign off on hours worked on the Timesheet.
- ☐ Complete Performance Evaluations and provide constructive feedback.

Laboratory/Organization Eligibility

The organization should:

- ☐ Assign a designated supervisor who is currently employed.
- ☐ Have a clear mission, scientific focus, and hypothesis that are connected to public health.
- ☐ Deliver proper onboarding and training.
- ☐ Provide a safe and adequate laboratory workspace, tools, and supplies; meeting CDC, state, and local guidelines.
- ☐ Ensure clear protocols for research subject privacy and data security.

Student Eligibility

You are expected to:

- ☐ Clearly communicate with the Supervisor and PHSC program about schedule changes.
- ☐ Maintain professional etiquette at all times.
- ☐ Meet or exceed expectations for research duties and project deliverables.
- ☐ Track hours on the Timesheet; meeting/exceeding the minimum hours required per credit hour.

Required Research Hours

Credits are earned based on hours worked, at 45 hours per credit.

Course Credit Hours	Total Hours Needed	Weekly Hours (Fall & Spring)	Weekly Hours (Summer)
1	45	3	4
2	90	6	8
3	135	9	12
4	180	12	16
5	225	15	20
6	270+	18+	25

Roles & Responsibilities

- **Students**: Actively engage in research, complete assigned tasks, and display professionalism.
- **Supervisors**: Provide oversight, mentorship, and feedback to support the research assistant's independent study experience and professional development.
- **PHSC Program**: Ensure approved research meets academic standards and provides support to students and supervisors.

Evaluation & Grading Process

- **Research Performance**: Evaluated based on supervisor feedback and your ability to meet the identified tasks and learning objectives.
- **Course Assignments**: Complete all assignments, including (but not limited to): time log, performance evaluation, reflection paper, poster presentation, and class discussions.
- **Final Grade**: Determined by the overall performance in both the research and assignments.

Part 2: Finding the right research

Effective Research Search Strategies

STEP 1: Identify Your Interests and Career Goals

- Clarify what you want to achieve and your interests in public health.
- Review the list of pre-approved sites on the "PHSC Research List" in CANVAS for inspiration.
- Consider all your options, including academic credits needed, your schedule and availability, and unpaid research or volunteer roles.

STEP 2: Organize and Plan Your Search

- Develop a structured plan and timeline for your research exploration.
- Contact faculty before the semester starts, as research positions fill up quickly.

- Attend research workshops or career prep classes (e.g., PHSC201 or EDCP108i).
- Set up email alerts for on- and off-campus research listings.
- Prepare your resume and cover letter in advance.

STEP 3: Contact and Connect with Faculty

- Many faculty members don't advertise open research assistant positions, preferring motivated students to approach them. Start by talking to your professors about their research. Understand the basics so you can ask informed questions and show your enthusiasm.

Tips for contacting your faculty:

Once you have identified faculty, send them a tailored email including:

- WHO: Introduce yourself– your major, academic year, etc.
- WHAT: A clear statement of why you are contacting them and the reason for your request.
- WHEN: When you would like to participate in the research (fall, spring, summer, or full year).
- WHERE: Explain where you will be during that time frame and what your availability is.
- WHY: A clear explanation of what interests you about the faculty member's research. Highlight coursework you have taken that is relevant to the research project.
- HOW: Mention of any previous research experience, knowledge of skills, or software that might be relevant to the project. Attach your unofficial transcript and resume.
- ACTION: Be clear about next steps. Request to set up a time to talk.

**Be persistent, but professional. Follow-up is appropriate after 1-2 weeks with no response.

Example email:

Subject: Interest in Joining Your Research Team on Health Disparities

Dear Professor Terp,

My name is Ada Testudo, and I am a junior majoring in Public Health Science at the University of Maryland. I am writing to express my interest in your study on using big data to analyze health disparities, a topic I am passionate about.

I am eager to join your research team this upcoming summer. I believe my relevant coursework and experience in data collection and research analysis will allow me to contribute to your project.

I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss how my skills and interests align with your team's needs. My schedule is flexible during the summer, and I am available for a meeting at your convenience. I have attached my resume for your review. Could we arrange a time to speak via phone, video conference, or in person?

Thank you for considering my application. I look forward to the possibility of working with you.

Sincerely, Ada Testudo

STEP 4: Highlight your Research Skills

- Regardless of the department or field you are completing research in, certain qualities are valued by researchers across all industries. Consider emphasizing these skills when applying:
    - Technical skills (any computer software or statistical analysis systems you have used)
    - Lab skills (techniques, tools, and skills you may have gained from past lab courses)
    - Attention to detail
    - Analytical skills
    - Communication skills (written and verbal)
    - Critical thinking skills
    - Organizational skills
- Not sure which skills to list in your resume? Review this skills inventory and tips sheet.

STEP 5: Explore a variety of laboratories and projects

- Focus on the types of laboratories and research teams that match your career interests. Apply to a broad variety of opportunities to enhance your odds.
- Reach out directly to the Primary Investigator (PI) or team (grad students and undergraduate researchers) to express your interest and to inquire about their hiring timeline and openings.
- Do not limit yourself to just research in the School of Public Health. Consider laboratories across campus, especially in CMNS and BSOS.
- Consider off-campus research being conducted outside of UMD, such as these.

Useful Research Search Resources

- **UMD Database:** The Office of Undergraduate Research compiles the most up-to-date listing of all open research opportunities, submitted directly by faculty.
- **PHSC Research Listing:** The PHSC Major Toolkit stores the lists of past research (and internship) sites, as well as alumni career paths in the Experiential Learning Module!
- **SPH Faculty & Staff Directory:** Search by "Expertise" area to find faculty who are experts in an area of public health you're curious about. Or talk with professors you already know!
- **SPH Research Centers:** Explore this website, as well as this laboratory listing, to learn about the range of research happening throughout the School.
- **UMD Career Services**: Utilize career services to tailor your application materials to be competitive for opportunities.

Need more help?

For further assistance or questions about PHSC389 or research, contact: **phscintern@umd.edu**