



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
DALLA LANA SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Public Health Sciences PhD orientation 2021

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Where are you?

- Dalla Lana School of Public Health (DLSPH) is a faculty of the University of Toronto.
- Two graduate departments:
 - Graduate Department of Public Health Sciences (PHS)
 - Institute of Health Policy, Management and Evaluation (IHPME)
- The PHS PhD program has four fields of study in:
 - Biostatistics
 - Epidemiology
 - Occupational and Environmental Health (OEH)
 - Social and Behavioural Health Sciences (SBHS)
- As administrative units, DLSPH has divisions with the same names.

Who am I?

- During your PhD studies you might come across the PHS Graduate Coordinator.
- The Graduate Coordinator serves as a general advisor for all PHS students registered in PHS's professional and research (PhD, MSc, MPH, MScCH, MHSc) programs, and works with the **Graduate Office** and **Program Directors** on various program administration related tasks.
- Signs **forms**.
- Is an active DLSPH faculty member.
- Reports to the **Associate Dean, Academic Affairs**.

How did you end up here?

- The four fields of study have their own admission committees and requirements, but generally the eligible applicants hold a Master's degree and have relevant field-specific research experience.
- In some fields, the successful applicants are already matched with potential supervisors, for others this may take place later.
- 2021 numbers: 31 new PhD students (5 international) out of 245 applicants.

Why are you here?

A bright young chachem told his grandmother that he was going to be a Doctor of Philosophy. She smiled proudly: 'Wonderful. But what kind of disease is philosophy?'

Leo Rosten

- The latin meaning of 'doctor' is 'teacher'; once you complete your PhD, you are ready to teach others.
- The PhD program will provide training in independent research.
- This does not mean that all graduates will end up as researchers in the academia (though many will); the graduates are also well prepared for leadership or supervisory roles in research institutes, government departments, hospitals, or industry.

What happens next?

- Path to candidacy:
 - Find a supervisor (complete **Student-Supervisor Conversation Checklist**, found at **PHS Academic Policies and Forms**).
 - Complete the coursework.
 - Pass the qualifying/comprehensive exams.
 - Assemble a **thesis advisory committee** (supervisor, possible co-supervisor, committee members).
 - Write and successfully defend a dissertation proposal ('research proposal', 'protocol').
- This takes 2, at most 3 years.
- Complete thesis and successfully defend it, in 4-5, at most 6 years.
- **Departmental defense** and **School of Graduate Studies defense** (Final Oral Examination).

- cf. 'hypothesis', which is just a conjecture, thesis is a proposition supported by arguments.
- In your case, it is a written report of an original research study.
- Thesis can be a monograph, or sandwich/manuscript based (typically 3 publishable manuscripts between an introduction and a discussion, see [Guidelines on Multiple Paper Dissertation](#)).
- Appropriate scope is determined by the advisory committee.

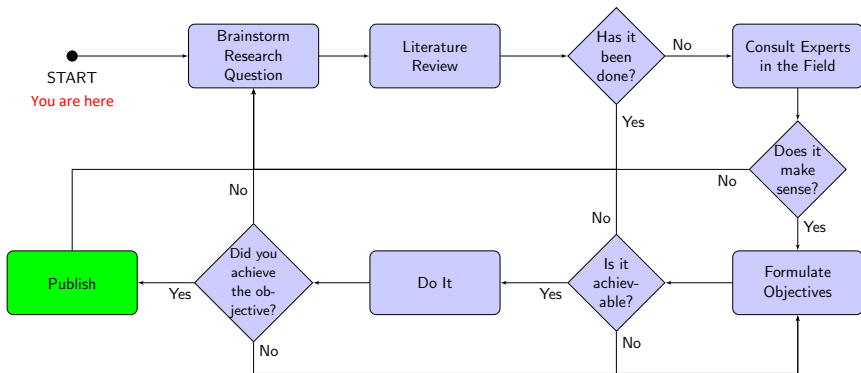
- Miettinen (2011):

Research - In natural science, inquiry into an abstract truth about Nature, specifically the studies on a given object of inquiry in the aggregate, as a whole.

Study - A piece of research; that is, a project to produce evidence (for inductive judgments) about the abstract truth (unknown) at issue.

- Your study requires planning; hence the protocol defense.
- Your immediate challenge will be to find a research question that both can be answered (feasibility) and has not yet been answered (novelty). The intersection of such problems is small; the low-hanging fruits have already been picked.
- Fortunately, research is formulaic (predictable) in nature, and you will get better at it through repetition.

Flow diagram of research (thanks to Thai-Son Tang)



Research proposal summary

- The Fall scholarship/award application deadlines are approaching.
- For the application, you need to prepare a research proposal summary.
- This should answer three questions:
 - *What* do you want to achieve? (objectives)
 - *Why* are you doing it? (goal, knowledge gap to motivate the objectives, significance)
 - *How* are you going achieve it? (approach to achieve the objectives)
- Same applies to the thesis proposal.
- Welcome and good luck in your research career.