

# **Graduate Group in Epidemiology and Biostatistics**

## **By-Laws**

**Ratified: April 15, 2016**

### **Introduction and Objectives**

The Graduate Group in Epidemiology and Biostatistics (GGEB) is a multi-disciplinary graduate Program comprising the disciplines of Epidemiology and Biostatistics. The research interests of our faculty members are diverse, touching on multiple areas of translational medicine, basic science, and public health. Within each of the two disciplines, the PhD Program trains individuals to be independent researchers who develop new approaches and apply existing methods to address relevant problems in biomedical research. The Biostatistics Program additionally offers an MS degree for individuals interested in the basic theory and application of statistical methods to biomedical research problems.

The GGEB comprises faculty with demonstrated research interests in the fields of Epidemiology, Biostatistics, and related fields. The GGEB is a member of the Biomedical Graduate Studies Program (BGS) in the Perelman School of Medicine, and has a significant affiliation with the Department of Biostatistics and Epidemiology (DBE) and the Center for Clinical Epidemiology and Biostatistics (CCEB).

### **Organization and Governance**

In all matters, the Graduate Group is governed by the University of Pennsylvania Handbook for Faculty and Academic Administrators, Section 1.F., Organization and Responsibilities of Graduate Groups ([http://provost.upenn.edu/uploads/media\\_items/i-f-organization-and-responsibilities-of-graduate-groups.original.pdf](http://provost.upenn.edu/uploads/media_items/i-f-organization-and-responsibilities-of-graduate-groups.original.pdf)).

## The Graduate Program Structure

Program Level: Two Programs currently exist within the GGEB: Epidemiology and Biostatistics. Students apply and are admitted to either the Program in Epidemiology or Biostatistics. While each Program has a unique curriculum, students have flexibility to determine the extent to which they engage in cross-disciplinary training and research. Students do not typically switch between Programs within the GGEB. Students who matriculate, and who subsequently wish to switch between Programs, must meet the requirements of the individual Program in order to pursue their degree in that Program.

Each Program will develop and annually review a mission statement. To meet the stated goals, each Program will design and implement a curriculum, develop and assess lab rotations, devise and implement preliminary exams and organize Program-specific activities and events. Each Program will also admit and recruit students to its Program, advise and supervise these students, and organize and supervise thesis committees. Each Program is responsible for maintaining and making available the component of the GGEB handbook that describes the individual Programs.

Establishment or disbandment of Programs shall require approval by two-thirds of the membership of the Executive Committee and must be ratified by more than half of the GGEB membership. Each Program shall individually determine changes in the composition of Program-specific committees and Program procedures. Major changes are subject to ratification by the Executive Committee.

Graduate Group: In addition to their role in developing and administering Program-specific activities, the Programs work with the Executive Committee of the GGEB graduate group in its oversight role of activities related to the responsible conduct of research, the code of student conduct, and student advising that may require interpretation of rules at the level of Biomedical Graduate Studies or the University of Pennsylvania. Importantly, the Programs work with the Executive Committee to identify areas of synergy, where cross-disciplinary cooperation may enrich the individual Programs. Cross-disciplinary Programs of mutual interest, involving major changes to existing Program structures, will be pursued upon approval by the Program-specific and GGEB memberships.

## Committee Structure

Committees include a GGEB-wide Executive Committee as well as Program-specific Committees.

## Executive Committee

The Executive Committee comprises the Chair, the Vice-Chair, the Program and Associate Program Chairs, and two *At Large* representatives elected from each Program. The Chair of the Department of Biostatistics and Epidemiology serves *ex officio* on the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee meets at least quarterly to discuss issues that affect the Graduate Group as a whole and/or its individual Programs. The Executive Committee provides

guidance to the Graduate Group and Program Chairs on these matters. The Executive Committee annually reviews and votes to ratify the handbook describing the overall graduate group, as well as the handbooks specific to each Program. This committee also approves the positions of Program and Associate Program Chairs as well as the Chairs of the standing committees within each Program.

Importantly, the Executive Committee may identify and recommend approaches for possible areas of integration of the two educational Programs, approval of major changes in policy, and degree requirements.

One meeting of the Executive Committee will be open to student participation each semester. These meetings will provide an opportunity for students to communicate openly with the Committee and vice-versa.

## **Graduate Group Chair**

The Chair of the Graduate Group is elected by the Graduate Group membership. The election of the Chair is subject to the approval of the Director of BGS, the Dean of the School of Medicine, the Vice Dean for Research and Research Training, and the Vice Provost for Education. The Chair is subject to the approval of the Director of BGS, the Dean of the School of Medicine, the Vice Dean for Research and Research Training, and the Vice Provost for Education. The Chair is responsible for coordinating the administration of the Graduate Group's educational Programs, particularly in the context of ensuring that the Programs are in compliance with the requirements of Biomedical Graduate Studies and the University of Pennsylvania. The GGEB Chair also serves an important role in helping to resolve academic and personal difficulties of individual students. The GGEB Chair schedules and determines an agenda for meetings of the Executive Committee, and serves as the representative of the GGEB to the Biomedical Advising Committee. The GGEB Chair may form *ad hoc* GGEB-wide committees to provide guidance to the Executive Committee and to the Programs on matters relevant to the membership as a whole. The GGEB Chair is responsible for the appointment of faculty to BGS and campus-wide committees. The GGEB Chair is responsible for final approval of doctoral dissertations. The Chair serves for a term of three years and may serve successive terms if re-elected by the members of the GGEB. During the third year of the Chair's term, the Graduate Group Executive Committee will nominate one or more faculty members from the Graduate Group to stand for election as Chair. Members of the Graduate Group will be requested to provide additional names for the ballot. The new will be elected by majority vote by closed ballot.

## **Graduate Group Vice Chair**

The Vice Chair of the Graduate Group is selected by the Chair of the GGEB and is subject to approval by the Executive Committee. S/he must be a member of the Program not represented by the Chair. The Vice Chair serves for three-year renewable terms. The Vice Chair advises the Chair on issues of substance and assists the chair in his/her various duties.

## **Program Chairs**

The Program members elect a Chair of each Program for a three-year renewable term. The selection is subject to approval by the Executive Committee. Program Chairs are responsible for the administration of their individual educational Program. The Program Chair is responsible for working with the appropriate Program committees, along with the Program membership, to design and implement a curriculum appropriate to its topic, and to ensure appropriate academic advising and supervision of the students in its Program. The Program Chair oversees the organization and supervision of thesis committees, subject to the approval of the GGEB chair. S/he works with the admissions committee in the screening and recruitment process, and with the faculty to organize Program-specific activities and events. The Program Chair approves the MS thesis or the doctoral dissertation of each student in the Program. The Program Chair is responsible for maintaining the components of the GGEB handbook describing the individual Programs, and for working with the GGEB chair to maintain the handbook describing the functions of the overall graduate group. The Program Chair also works with the Program-specific committees, as well as the membership, to continually evaluate the Program and to initiate changes as needed. The Program Chairs appoint Chairs of the standing and *ad hoc* committees within each Program subject to the approval by the Executive. The Program Chairs are responsible for determining suitable funding plans for the students within their Program, subject to approval by the Executive Committee. The process for electing the Program Chairs is described in the GGEB Policies and Procedures document.

## **Associate Program Chairs**

The Associate Program Chairs of the Epidemiology and Biostatistics educational Programs are selected by the Program Chairs, on an as-needed basis, when required by the size or complexity of a given program. Selected Associate Chairs are subject to approval by the Executive Committee. The Associate Chairs advise their respective Program Chairs on issues of substance and assist them in fulfilling their responsibilities.

## **Standing Committees**

Graduate Group standing committees include Curriculum, Admissions, Examinations, and Academic Review Committees within each of the two training Programs. Chairs of the standing committees are appointed by the individual Program Chairs, and the constituency of each committee is appointed by the committee chairs in consultation with the Program Chairs. Each committee will also have one student representative who will be elected by their respective Program's student body (and subject to the approval of the Executive Committee) to serve as a voting member, except as noted below.

The *Curriculum Committees* shall meet to consider major or minor revisions to the curriculum. Minor actions such as suggestions to individual course directors may proceed without approval

of the membership. Major revisions of the curriculum will be presented to the Program membership for ratification, and subsequently forwarded to the GGEB Chair and the Biomedical Graduate Studies Curriculum Committee for approval. In collaboration with the Program Chair, the Curriculum Committee reviews course evaluations and suggests approaches for remediation as needed.

The *Admissions Committees* review all applications to the Program, select the most promising applicants for interviewing and recruitment, and ultimately identify those who will be offered admission to the Program. The committees are responsible for organizing and implementing the interview and recruitment process.

The *Examinations Committees* are charged with overseeing the creation, administration, and grading of the qualifications examinations for their respective Programs. The Examinations Committee will not have a student representative.

The *Academic Review and Advising Committees* track the performance of all students through the Program, serve as formal advisers to students in the Program, and assist the Program Chair, and in more serious cases the GGEB Chair, in resolving academic problems. Each Committee shall meet at least twice per semester to review student progress and provide advice on Program and course selection. Each Program's Academic Review and Advising Committee will include one student who will be elected by their respective Program's student body to serve as a voting member. However, these students will be excused from any discussions regarding any disciplinary issues and they will not have a vote on these matters.

## Additional Program Committees

Each Program may form committees as needed for the purpose of specific functions. These committees are not subject to Executive Committee or Chair approval, but require approval from the respective Program Chair. Such committees do not perform a governance function; examples are awards and social events committees.

## Membership

Graduate Group members include faculty with interests in epidemiology and biostatistics, as well as others with a demonstrated research and teaching interest in related fields. Members must be from the standing, associated, or emeritus faculty at the University of Pennsylvania. Depending on their field of expertise, and their own preference, faculty are appointed to membership in one or both Programs. **As a minimum requirement, a member of the graduate group must be qualified and able to supervise the thesis or dissertation research of a graduate student.**

## New Members

New members must be nominated by at least one current member and submit an application, which includes a cover letter describing proposed contributions and a Curriculum Vitae. The Graduate Group's Executive Committee reviews applications and submits new appointments and renewals for approval by the Director of BGS and the Dean.

## Membership Maintenance

In order to maintain membership, members must provide an average of approximately 50 hours of service annually over a three year period. Membership is subject to renewal every three years. *Service activities must involve PhD students (and/or MS students in the biostatistics Program).* These activities include: advising a student; serving as a member of a thesis/dissertation committee; acting as a course director or course lecturer/seminar leader in which PhD students are enrolled; serving as a PhD-specific track or Program leader; reviewing student manuscripts, grant proposals, and protocols; attending student presentations; participating in the CCEB and/or Biostatistics seminar series; and serving on one or more of the Graduate Groups' standing or ad hoc committees. Other activities will be considered upon request.

Every member must participate in a bioethics/responsible conduct of research training Program at least once during each three-year term. This requirement may be met by serving as a discussion leader of a BGS bioethics or RCR workshop; other options for participation include attending other relevant BGS-approved University bioethics courses or symposia. In addition, mentors are required to lead semi-annual RCR discussions with their mentees and any staff who work with them, per BGS policy (<http://www.med.upenn.edu/bgs/rcr.shtml>):

*Faculty must dedicate at least two lab meetings (1-2 hrs each) per year to RCR training. To this end, Faculty have access to the aforementioned case studies to use as discussion pieces, in addition to their own resources or examples from their own experience. The expectation is for these events to be interactive discussions that ideally include all laboratory personnel, but minimally explicitly include all graduate students who work in that lab. After each such event, the Faculty member is expected to fill out the online form found here:*

[http://www.med.upenn.edu/bgs/RCR\\_FORM.shtml](http://www.med.upenn.edu/bgs/RCR_FORM.shtml)

"Lab meeting" is interpreted here to mean working group or other research entity that involves graduate students. Notably, for Biostatistics where the classroom serves as a lab during the students' first two years, a "lab meeting" may be defined as a classroom discussion of issues related to RCR.

## Membership Renewal

Members are appointed for three-year, renewable terms. Each member is required to submit a letter requesting reappointment, with a summary of GGEB-related activities in which he or she participated, describing proposed contributions for the coming three-year term, and a *curriculum vitae*. The letter indicates the desired Program of membership. Nomination by a current GGEB member is not required for membership renewals. However, lapsed members

will be considered as new members. They must be re-nominated by a current GGEB member, submit their credentials, and be approved by the Executive Committee and subsequently the GGEB membership.

Members who lose their Graduate Group membership may be nominated for new membership at any time. A faculty member whose membership is not renewed may appeal the decision to his or her Program Chair. The Executive Committee will vote again on reappointment after this appeal.

## Meetings

### **Graduate Group**

The GGEB Chair will schedule meetings at least biannually. Meetings can also be held at the request of 51% of the membership. All GGEB members are required to participate in these biannual meetings. A quorum of at least 51% of the GGEB membership is required in order for a vote to be taken on any matter before the membership. Votes can be submitted via email or in person at the meeting. Those voting by email must request a proxy ballot in advance of the meeting.

### **Program**

Each Program Chair will regularly hold meetings to communicate issues under discussion by the various committees to the Program membership, and to ask for feedback on specific issues relevant to the program. The Program and/or Associate Program Chair will communicate any results of substance arising from these meeting to the Executive Committee. Members of the individual Programs will meet annually to consider and ratify changes to the Mission Statement of the individual Programs, and to ratify changes to the Program-specific components of the handbook.

## **GGEB Policies and Procedures**

The GGEB Chair, in collaboration with the Executive Committee, develops and approves policies and procedures specific to the administration and operation of the graduate group. The documentation of these policies and procedures will be made publicly available to the GGEB membership.

## Revisions of the By-Laws

Proposed revisions to the By-Laws will be considered at a Graduate Group meeting, or at the discretion of the Chair, in consultation with the Vice Chair, circulated by email to the

membership. The revised By-Laws will be accepted if ratified by a two-thirds majority among a quorum of GGEB members.