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1 INTRODUCTION

This handbook describes the Master’s Degree Program in Health Data Science offered by the Department of Biostatistics at Harvard University. The SM program prepares graduates to handle “Big Data” in addressing the biomedical research questions that are becoming increasingly commonplace in hospitals and universities, research organizations, and the pharmaceutical and biotechnology industries. It can also provide the foundation for further doctoral studies.

The sections of this handbook include information and regulations concerning entrance requirements, program descriptions, degree requirements, and other program policies. Policies and official requirements of the School of Public Health are set forth in the *Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health Student Handbook* (https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/student-handbook/). Each graduate student is responsible for general knowledge of, and adherence to, the policies and requirements of the degree program in which the student is enrolled. Additional program information is available at the website https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/health-data-science/program/. Vitally important for our community is that all members demonstrate respect for each other and our discipline. For all members of the community, respect is demonstrated by attending all scheduled classes or meetings, and arriving on time, fully prepared, and ready to participate.

This handbook was prepared by the **Executive Committee of the Program in Health Data Science**. Dr. Heather Mattie is responsible for reviewing the student’s program of study, and has the authority to consider exceptions to the rules and regulations established by the Executive Committee. The Program Directors welcome suggestions and comments.
PROGRAM LEADERSHIP AND ADMINISTRATION

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Websites
Master of Science in Health Data Science
Department of Biostatistics
2 Master of Science in Health Data Science

2.1 Core Competencies

This 60-credit program, offered by the Department of Biostatistics, is designed to provide students with targeted skills and knowledge required for work in health data science. These specific skills and knowledge domains are:

- Recognize study design and its scientific and/or societal context
- Practice data gathering, preparation, transformation, and exploration
- Prepare data visualization, presentation, and communication
- Employ appropriate computing paradigms for efficiency and reproducibility
- Evaluate modeling context, apply suitable models and methods, and interpret results

The SM in Health Data Science is intended as a terminal professional degree which will enable students to launch their careers in health-related data science. It can also provide the foundation for further doctoral studies in biostatistics or other quantitative or computational sciences with an emphasis in data science.

Students will receive training in quantitative methods, including applied regression, statistical inference, statistical computing, machine learning, statistical consultation and collaboration, and epidemiology.

2.2 Admissions Procedures and Requirements

2.2.1 Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health Requirements

Application for admission to the SM program is available online on the Admissions Office website (https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/admissions/admissions/how-to-apply/application-requirements/). For information on general requirements for admission, contact the Admissions Office by phone (617-432-1031) or through their website (https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/admissions/).

2.2.2 Program Requirements

All candidates for admission to the SM in Health Data Science program must have the following:

- An undergraduate degree in the mathematical sciences or allied fields (statistics, economics, etc.) or computer science, with a strong interest in health science,
- practical knowledge of computer scripting and programming, as well as experience with a statistical computing language such as R or Python,
- calculus through multivariable integration,
- one semester of linear algebra or matrix methods, and
- excellent written and spoken English.

Additional research or work experience would be considered beneficial, but not required.

Evidence that these requirements have been fulfilled should form part of the application.

If candidates have questions about whether their coursework is meeting the requirements above, we recommend that they look at the required courses for the program in this handbook and decide. Also, we generally prefer in-person courses for such requirements, but if you choose an online course from platforms like edX or Coursera, such is only acceptable if the material and assessments are comparable to an in-person university course. See this linked list of examples for comparison. If the courses taken do not have the titles mentioned above (like linear algebra or multivariable calculus), then make sure to explain in your statement of purpose in the application which courses you have taken that covered the materials. Please include dates taken, grades received, and institution (whether online or not) in the statement as well.
2.3 Intra/Inter-departmental Biostatistics Degree Program Switch Protocol

The Department of Biostatistics, and several other academic departments at the School (such as Epidemiology), offer master’s degree programs. These programs each have their own goals and requirements and make independent decisions about admissions. Students should carefully choose the program to which they apply and we expect students admitted to a program to meet the requirements of that program.

However, we recognize that the interests of some students may change during their time in graduate school. Therefore, the Department has established the following procedure for students applying for a change in program. This applies to students applying for a switch within the Department of Biostatistics, or between the Department of Biostatistics and another department at the School, such as Epidemiology. Please note that transfers between programs are not automatic and may not be approved, and if a student has received a scholarship or other funds from a degree program, that funding will not transfer to the new degree.

1. Students must complete at least one full semester of coursework before applying for a program transfer.

2. Students must enroll in and successfully pass any required coursework for their current program before beginning the transfer process. Please see your current degree program handbook for a list of required coursework. Students may also need to complete coursework in their proposed program so as to not fall behind in requirements to finish their program on time if approved for transfer.

3. Students must complete and submit a formal application and include an updated statement of purpose describing the reason for seeking a program transfer, current CV and one letter of recommendation.

4. The Directors of department master’s programs, including the Directors of the student’s current program and prospective program, will schedule an interview with the students to assess their application. At the meeting, students will provide a copy of their CV and statement of purpose to the program director(s), and will briefly explain their decision to apply for a transfer. The Directors will consider the applications and render a decision whether to approve or deny the transfer. These meetings will be scheduled in early January for students applying for transfer to start in the Spring semester, and in late May for students applying to transfer after the Spring semester.

5. The Directors will discuss and notify the student of their decision within three days. All decisions are final, and students are not allowed to reapply.

6. If approved, completed paperwork must be submitted to the Registrar’s Office, and then to the Senior Manager of Academic Services.

Note that all program transfers are at the discretion of the program Directors and are not guaranteed. If approved, students will be assigned a new academic advisor affiliated with the chosen degree program. It is the responsibility of the students to ensure that they complete all requirements for their degree program.

2.4 Curricular Practical Training (CPT) Approval for Students with F-1 Visas

To be considered CPT, the work must not only be related to the student’s major field of study but must also be an integral part of an established curriculum. Before seeking off-campus internship opportunities, students are required to discuss their plans with Elizabeth Capuano (see contact info below) from the Harvard International Office to determine their CPT eligibility. Please note that CPT eligibility may be impacted by the March 2020 guidance issued by the Department of Homeland Security - Student Exchange Visitor Program.

There are two ways in which students are eligible for CPT:
1. Employment that is a required part of a degree program, such as a required internship or practicum. This requirement must be formally documented in school publications, such as a student handbook.

2. Employment that is not required by a degree program, but for which a program will award academic credits. This could include training courses such as a field studies course, or an independent study (see Section 2.5) course that is based on an internship.

International students who wish to pursue this option MUST speak with Elizabeth Capuano (elizabeth.capuano@harvard.edu), our representative at the Harvard International Office (HIO), before beginning interview processes at prospective internship sites to discuss the requirements for CPT authorization. Students should also speak to one of the directors about whether their employment would qualify for academic credits, as the academic credits are required for CPT authorization. When contacting the program directors, please complete the HDS CPT Project Proposal form to submit to them for review. If CPT eligibility is established, please note that students MUST obtain CPT authorization PRIOR to beginning the internship. If doing a summer internship for academic credit, students must sign up for BST 305 CPT-Related Independent Study (Section 2.5) in the following fall semester, or during the summer (see last paragraph in Section 2.5) about tuition costs.

The most up-to-date information about CPT will be found here: http://www.hio.harvard.edu/curricular-practical-training-cpt.

2.5 Independent Studies

2.5.1 General Independent Study

For independent study not related to a required thesis project or curricular practical training (CPT), the student should discuss with the chosen supervisor the credit hours needed (usually 2.5 credits per term*), and the scope of the work involved before enrolling. If the direct supervisor is not at the School, you’ll need to find a department faculty member here who will agree to review your progress, even if they are not involved in the project day-to-day. This person can be your academic advisor, one of the program directors, or any other member of the executive committee (Page 2). To register for independent study, the student should sign up for a section of BST 300 with Dr. Brent Coull (who is the Associate Chair), and in the petition to enroll include the name and email address of the direct supervisor, your internal faculty supervisor, and a 1-2 sentence description of the topic to be researched. At the time of registration, the student should also send an email to Jelena (cc’ing the direct supervisor) with the information about the project.

2.5.2 CPT-related Independent Study

For independent study related to curricular practical training (CPT), the student should follow the instructions of Section 2.4, and submit a 1-page proposal of the work to be done during this CPT to their program directors along with the information required by the Harvard International Office (HIO). Program directors will need both before approving the CPT work. At the end of the CPT work, students should submit a 1-page report on the work done, signed by their off-campus supervisor. Both the proposal and the report should tie back to the competencies of the degree program (listed in Section 2.1 of this handbook). To register for the CPT-related independent study, the student should sign up for a section of BST 305 with Dr. Brent Coull (who is the Associate Chair), and in the petition to enroll include the name and email address of the direct supervisor.

2.6 Change to Part-Time Study / Leave of Absence

If students find it necessary to change their status, they may do so by submitting a General Petition to the Registrar’s Office. Part-time master of science students may take fewer than 15 credits per term. Please read the information found at the Student Knowledge Center about changing your status (https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/r-o-student-knowledge-center/changing-full-time-part-time-status/).

*Students may enroll in a maximum of 5 credits of independent study for the degree program.
Because of the core course schedule for the HDS degree program, you need to be aware that if you take a leave of absence from the program, you should take a full year, and not just a semester. Taking a semester will disrupt your ability to complete the program in time, and you may have to pay a continuation fee or a full semester’s worth of tuition for the extension needed. Please check with the Registrar’s Office to confirm the charge that may be added.

2.7 Advising and Degree Program Approval

2.7.1 Academic Advisor
All entering students are assigned an academic advisor to help plan course loads and explain program requirements. At the earliest possible date, the student and the academic advisor will develop a program of study. Should a student wish to change their academic advisor, they are encouraged to discuss this with Dr. Mattie. In addition, SPH provides services for all students with clinically documented learning and/or physical disabilities.

2.7.2 Departmental Approval of Program
The Master’s degree program plan must be submitted to the student’s academic advisor and Dr. Mattie, for approval by the Executive Committee, using the Master’s Degree Program form provided. This plan should be submitted at least one semester prior to your expected graduation date.

2.7.3 Epidemiology Requirement
The School of Public Health requires that Master’s students successfully pass one epidemiology course. The program requires that EPI 201 (Fall 1, 2.5 credits) be taken to satisfy this requirement in the first semester of the degree program.

2.7.4 Public Health Practice Requirement
Students may be required to take a public health course by the School of Public Health as part of their accreditation requirements. These requirements will be communicated to all incoming students by the School of Public Health directly.

2.7.5 Research Ethics Requirement
Students must satisfy a research ethics requirement by completing a course in responsible conduct of research or by completing an online training course during the first year in the program. Students who feel they have already completed an equivalent training program must submit adequate documentation to, and receive approval from, the Senior Manager of Academic Services in Biostatistics (see contact list on page 1) during the first semester in residence.

2.8 Teaching Fellow Guidelines
The department’s current Teaching Fellow Guidelines may be found here (https://content.sph.harvard.edu/biostats/publications/handbook/TF_Guidelines.pdf). If you are assigned a teaching fellow appointment, please reference this document to understand the policies surrounding teaching at the department and the School.

2.9 Satisfactory Progress Requirements
For students in the program, a total of 60 credits are required with a minimum of 55 ordinal credits from the core courses, computer science courses, and electives listed in Section 2.10.1, the epidemiology requirement in Section 2.7.3, and the Health Data Science Practice in Section 2.10.2. In addition, SPH students must remain in good academic standing, must complete program requirements within the designated time to degree, and must maintain a cumulative grade point average of 2.70 or above. All ordinal grades for courses
used to satisfy program requirements specified in Section 2.10.1 and Section 2.10.2 must be at the level of B- or higher. Courses taken on a pass/fail basis cannot be used to satisfy ordinally graded program requirements.

A detailed presentation of SPH’s regulations for Master’s students is found at https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/student-handbook/. All Master’s students and their advisors should make sure that SPH and HDS program requirements are met according to schedule.

2.10 Degree Requirements

A total of 60 credits are required for the SM60 in Health Data Science. Students with prior equivalent background to any of the required courses or strong reasons to take a different course can request permission from Dr. Mattie, for approval by the Executive Committee, for a substitution of one or more of the required courses. Students should submit a degree program form to Dr. Mattie at least one semester prior to their expected graduation date.

2.10.1 Course Requirements for the Health Data Science SM60 Degree

The degree requirements include a 20 credit ordinally graded core curriculum consisting of:

- BST 222 Basics of Statistical Inference (Fall, 5 credits)
- BST 260 Introduction to Data Science (Fall, 5 credits)
- BST 261 Data Science II (Spring, 2.5 credits)
- BST 262 Computing for Big Data (Fall, 2.5 credits)
- BST 263 Statistical Learning (Spring, 5 credits)

An additional five ordinal credits must be taken in computer science from the following list

- BST 221 Applied Data Structures and Algorithms (5 credits)
- BST 249 Bayesian Methodology in Biostatistics (5 credits)
  or STAT 220 Bayesian Data Analysis (5 credits)
- BST 281 Genomic Data Manipulation (5 credits)
- BST 282 Introduction to Computational Biology and Bioinformatics (5 credits)
- APMTH 120 Applied Linear Algebra and Big Data (5 credits)
- APMTH 207 Advanced Scientific Computing: Stochastic Methods for Data Analysis, Inference and Optimization (5 credits)
- BMI 713 Computing Skills for Biomedical Sciences (2.5 credits)
- BMI 715 Computational Statistics for Biomedical Sciences (2.5 credits)
- CS 105 Privacy and Technology (5 credits)
- CS 107 Systems Development for Computational Science (5 credits)
- CS 124 Data Structures and Algorithms (5 credits)
- CS 165 Data Systems (5 credits)
- CS 171 Visualization (5 credits)
- CS 182 Artificial Intelligence (5 credits)
- CS 205 High Performance Computing for Science and Engineering (5 credits)
- STAT 171 Introduction to Stochastic Processes (5 credits)
- MIT 6.7940 Dynamic Programming and Reinforcement Learning (5 credits)
- MIT 6.8300 Advances in Computer Vision (5 credits)

An additional 22.5 ordinal credits must be taken. Courses that would satisfy these requirements may come from the following list of elective courses:

- BST 210 Applied Regression Analysis (5 credits)
- BST 214 Principles of Clinical Trials (2.5 credits)
- BST 216 Introduction to Quantitative Methods for Monitoring and Evaluation (2.5 credits)
- BST 223 Applied Survival Analysis (5 credits)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Code</th>
<th>Course Title</th>
<th>Credits</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BST 226</td>
<td>Applied Longitudinal Analysis</td>
<td>5 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BST 227</td>
<td>Introduction to Statistical Genetics</td>
<td>2.5 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BST 228</td>
<td>Applied Bayesian Analysis</td>
<td>5 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BST 267</td>
<td>Introduction to Social and Biological Networks</td>
<td>2.5 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BST 273</td>
<td>Introduction to Programming</td>
<td>2.5 credits</td>
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<tr>
<td>BST 280</td>
<td>Introductory Genomics &amp; Bioinformatics for Health Research</td>
<td>2.5 credits</td>
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<tr>
<td>BST 283</td>
<td>Cancer Genome Data Science</td>
<td>5 credits</td>
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<tr>
<td>EPI 202</td>
<td>Epidemiologic Methods 2: Elements of Epidemiologic Research</td>
<td>2.5 credits</td>
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<tr>
<td>EPI 203</td>
<td>Study Design in Epidemiologic Research</td>
<td>2.5 credits</td>
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<tr>
<td>EPI 204</td>
<td>Analysis of Case-Control, Cohort and Other Epidemiologic Data</td>
<td>2.5 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPI 233</td>
<td>Research Synthesis &amp; Meta-Analysis</td>
<td>2.5 credits</td>
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<tr>
<td>EPI 271</td>
<td>Propensity Score Analysis: Theoretical &amp; Practical Considerations</td>
<td>1.25 credits</td>
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<tr>
<td>EPI 286</td>
<td>Database Analytics in Pharmacoepidemiology</td>
<td>2.5 credits</td>
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<tr>
<td>EPI 288</td>
<td>Introduction to Machine Learning and Risk Prediction</td>
<td>2.5 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPI 293</td>
<td>Analysis of Genetic Association Studies</td>
<td>2.5 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPI 511</td>
<td>Advanced Population and Medical Genetics</td>
<td>5 credits</td>
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<tr>
<td>RDS 280</td>
<td>Decision Analysis for Health and Medical Practices</td>
<td>2.5 credits</td>
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<tr>
<td>RDS 282</td>
<td>Economic Evaluation of Health Policy and Program Management</td>
<td>2.5 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RDS 285</td>
<td>Decision Analysis Methods in Public Health and Medicine</td>
<td>2.5 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APCOMP 221</td>
<td>Critical Thinking in Data Science</td>
<td>5 credits</td>
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<tr>
<td>BMI 701</td>
<td>Foundations of Biomedical Informatics I</td>
<td>5 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMI 702</td>
<td>Foundations of Biomedical Informatics II</td>
<td>5 credits</td>
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<tr>
<td>BMI 703</td>
<td>Precision Medicine I: Genomic Medicine</td>
<td>2.5 credits</td>
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<tr>
<td>BMI 704</td>
<td>Data Science for Medical Decision Making</td>
<td>2.5 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMI 705</td>
<td>Precision Medicine II: Integrating Clinical and Genomic Data</td>
<td>2.5 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMI 706</td>
<td>Data Visualization for Biomedical Applications</td>
<td>2.5 credits</td>
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<tr>
<td>APCOMP 209A</td>
<td>Data Science 1: Introduction to Data Science</td>
<td>5 credits</td>
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<tr>
<td>APCOMP 209B</td>
<td>Data Science 2: Advanced Topics in Data Science</td>
<td>5 credits</td>
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<tr>
<td>CS 283</td>
<td>Advanced Computer Vision</td>
<td>5 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HST .953</td>
<td>Clinical Data Learning, Visualization, and Deployments</td>
<td>5 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIT 6.8610</td>
<td>Quantitative Methods for Natural Language Processing</td>
<td>5 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIT 6.7930</td>
<td>Machine Learning for Healthcare [aka HST .956]</td>
<td>5 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STAT 117</td>
<td>Data Analysis in Modern Biostatistics</td>
<td>5 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STAT 131</td>
<td>Introduction to Time Series &amp; Prediction</td>
<td>5 credits</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

1Not all courses in this list will be offered every year.

Other courses may also be acceptable. EPI 201 (see Section 2.7.3) and HDSC 325 (see Section 2.10.2) will count toward the 55-credit ordinal courses required. Courses offered to only undergrads are not allowed to be taken for credit by HSPH. Because MIT does change course numbers often, please check to make sure that the course has not changed to ‘undergrad only’.

**Note that a maximum of half your total credits per semester can be cross-registered courses without special permission, and a maximum of half of your required 60 credits can be cross-registered courses. This is a School policy.**

If you need cross-registration credit conversion, see: [https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/r-o-student-knowledge-center/](https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/r-o-student-knowledge-center/). Students are advised to consult with Dr. Mattie about any substitutions. To request a substitution, first students should email graduate program coordinator, David Cruikshank, to determine if the course has been approved before. If not, then students should email Dr. Mattie with their reasons for the request (please cc David so that he may file the information for the final degree audit).
2.10.2 Health Data Science Practice

The health data science practice will provide a culminating research experience that tests all competencies through a hands-on semester-long project-based research course (7.5 credits). This course will allow students to immerse themselves in multiple health data science projects in public health and biomedical science.

HDSC 325 Health Data Science Practice (7.5 credits)

The course will be co-taught by two faculty members with complementary expertise in statistics and computer science. The overall objective of this course is to allow students to integrate and apply various methods introduced in previous core coursework in the Health Data Science program to different real-world data sets across knowledge domains. This is a predominantly project-based course with lectures focusing on project planning and execution, career development and special advanced topics in data science.

Students will be randomly assigned to teams of 2-3 individuals. Each team will be assigned a Harvard affiliate mentor who will grant access to data at the mentor’s respective institution and assign a semester-long project. Each team will be expected to work on the project outside of class and meet with their project mentor regularly. Course instructors will also regularly check-in with students and project mentors to ensure appropriate project expectations and progress. Teams will also be responsible for 2 presentations on the progress of the project before the final presentation of the project on the last day of class. Teams will be expected to complete a project analysis plan, project abstract and final project report including all code and visualizations.
3 ADMINISTRATIVE TIMELINE

Detailed requirements and deadlines for degree completion are given on the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health webpage. All forms linked below are also located on the last page of this Graduate Student Handbook.

- **Summer Before Entering Program**
  - Take optional R/Python Programming Bootcamp/EdX online course.

- **Year One**
  - **First Semester**
    - Complete Research Ethics requirement by taking the free online CITI program or attending HPM 548 (See section 2.7.5). You will receive a reminder about where to find the online course before beginning the Fall term.
    - If planning to waive courses, ask for those waivers of Fall core courses by emailing Dr. Mattie and David Cruikshank with details about the course(s) taken or experience that may qualify for a waiver by the end of the first week of classes in Fall. To waive EPI 201 which is a school-wide core requirement, students must submit this Waiver of Core Courses Form through the online form for approval before August 1, and then submit signed approval form through my.harvard to the Registrar’s Office.
  - **Second Semester**
    - Complete or waive Spring core courses.
    - Turn in the final program form by May 10.

- **Year Two**
  - **Third Semester**
    - Take HDSC 325 Health Data Science Practice.

4 PROGRAM FORMS

- **HDS SM60 Degree Program Form**
  https://content.sph.harvard.edu/biostats/publications/hds_handbook/SM60_Degree_Form_HDS.pdf

- **HDS CPT Proposal Form**