



**Universität
Zürich^{UZH}**

Master Program in Biostatistics

Study Guide

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Motivation

Statistical methods for quantitative research have been gaining enormously in importance in science and technology. In biological and life sciences this trend is apparent through the success of relevant journals such as *Biostatistics*, *Bioinformatics*, *Journal of Computational Biology*, *Statistical Methods in Medical Research*.

Biostatistics is the science of analyzing and interpreting biomedical data, from clinical trials to observational studies to systematic reviews. This requires the development of appropriate statistical methodology and its competent application. The Master Program in Biostatistics combines in-depth statistical knowledge with clinical/biological data and provides the skills for becoming an expert in data analysis and study design.

1 Key Features

The Master Program in Biostatistics is a specialized master and is hence open to students with (Bachelor) degrees from different fields with a sufficient quantitative component in the curriculum. It is therefore a useful and direct continuation for graduates in biology, biomedicine, psychology, mathematics, data science, computer science, statistics, economics, and similar. Students with a penchant for quantitative techniques and an interest in acquiring modern solution-oriented skills for biomedical research are suitable candidates for the program. For admission to the specialized study program in biostatistics, all applicants must have completed a Bachelor's degree program and meet identical requirements with regard to prior knowledge of analysis, linear algebra, probability and statistics, and biology/biomedicine. The program is designed as a three semester study program (if studying full-time) requiring 90 ECTS credit points.

Methodological aspects of statistics are taught in consideration of questions from clinical research and epidemiology. Special emphasis is on recent research topics such as randomized clinical trials, statistical genomics, clinical epidemiology or infectious disease epidemiology. Graduates will therefore be highly qualified for an occupation at universities or research institutes and in the pharmaceutical industry.

The program is offered by the Department of Biostatistics of the Epidemiology, Biostatistics and Prevention Institute of the University of Zurich (UZH). The Academic Regulations (Studienordnung) and the Framework Academic Regulations (Rahmenordnung) of the Faculty of Science contain all legally binding regulations; this study guide elaborates on technical structure and admission process. The Faculty of Science awards the degree "Master of Science UZH in Biostatistics" to graduates of the program.

The master program Biostatistics (90 ECTS) can also be combined with any minor (30 ECTS) from [→this list](#), except for Applied Probability and Statistics. If this option is chosen, the master's program turns into a 120 ECTS credit points program with a minimum duration of 4 semesters.

2 Structure

2.1 Duration

The Master Program in Biostatistics is usually completed in three semesters, i.e. two semesters of course work, followed by approximately six months for the Master's thesis.

2.2 Credit Point Requirements

The required 90 ECTS credit points have to be gained from compulsory modules (Pflichtmodule) and elective modules (Wahlmodule), see Table 1. One ECTS credit point corresponds to approximately 30 hours of work.

Table 1: Minimal requirements to complete the Master Program in Biostatistics at the University of Zurich.

Compulsory modules		
	Coursework	37 ECTS
	Master's thesis	30 ECTS
	Master's exam	3 ECTS
Elective modules		20 ECTS

2.3 Language

All compulsory modules and all elective biostatistical modules given below are taught in English. Some of the possible elective modules may only be offered in German. However, there will always be enough modules taught in English to obtain the required 90 ECTS credit points without knowing German.

2.4 Compulsory Modules

The coursework part of the compulsory modules provides knowledge of the core methods of biostatistics and gives a first experience in applying and extending these. It

should be completed in the first two semesters of the program and it has to be attended at the University of Zurich. Table 2 gives an overview for all compulsory modules, contents of the compulsory modules can be found on the website of the program → <https://www.biostat.uzh.ch/curriculum/compulsory-modules>.

Table 2: Compulsory modules of the Master Program in Biostatistics at the University of Zurich. Lectures are in general completed by exercises (LE) and hours per week are divided into lecture and exercise part (e.g. 2+1), half term modules are indicated (1/2).

Likelihood and Regression I	LE 2+1 + lab	7 ECTS
Clinical Biostatistics	LE 2+1 + lab	7 ECTS
Good Statistical Practice	flipped classroom	4 ECTS
Statistical Methods in Epidemiology	LE 2+1	5 ECTS
Likelihood and Regression II	LE 2+1 + lab, 1/2	4 ECTS
Biostatistics Journal Club	Seminar	4 ECTS
Statistical Practice in Clinical Research	Project	6 ECTS
Master's thesis	Thesis	30 ECTS
Master's Exam	Exam	3 ECTS

The Master's thesis is an independent research activity, which can, for example, be in the framework of an integrative project involving participants from other disciplines. It involves approximately a full-time six month workload and is concluded by a written report. A professor, who defines the subject and specifies the submission date, supervises the thesis. It is advisable to start choosing a topic for the Master's thesis at the end of the second semester. All compulsory modules must be completed before the start of the Master's thesis.

The Master's exam consists of an oral presentation of the Master's thesis followed by questions from an expert audience including the supervisor. The student needs to show the ability to clearly present the relevance of the thesis and to defend it in view of critical questions.

2.5 Elective Modules

Elective modules offer the flexibility to select a focus of interest and explore specific topics in biostatistics in greater depth. They further extend the students knowledge of biostatistical (and statistical) methods. At least 20 ECTS credit points have to be gained from elective modules and can be chosen within the range of modules in biostatistics,

statistics, or quantitative methods in biomedical research which are offered at UZH (see Table 3) or ETHZ. Modules fulfilling these criteria as well as detailed descriptions of the biostatistical elective modules are given on our website → www.biostat.uzh.ch. Other appropriate courses at UZH, ETHZ, or another Swiss university may, in agreement with the scientific coordinator, also be taken.

Table 3: Possible biostatistical elective modules offered at University of Zurich. Lectures are in general completed by exercises (LE) and hours per week are divided into lecture and exercise part (e.g. 2+1), half term modules are indicated (1/2).

Statistical Analysis of High-Throughput			
Genomic and Transcriptomic Data	LE 2+1	5 ECTS	every year
Statistical Modeling	LE 2+1	5 ECTS	every year
Longitudinal Data Analysis	LE 2+1, 1/2	3 ECTS	every 2nd year
R Programming	LE 3, project, 1/2	2 ECTS	every 2nd year
Foundations of Bayesian Methodology	LE 2+1, 1/2	4 ECTS	every 2nd year
Statistical Methods of Infectious			
Disease Epidemiology	LE 2+1, 1/2	3 ECTS	every year
Meta-analysis	LE 2+1, 1/2	3 ECTS	irregular
Introduction to Machine Learning (ML)			
in Biomedicine	LE 2	3 ECTS	every year

Ideally most of the elective coursework should be completed in the first two semesters, obtaining some remaining ECTS credit points in the third semester in parallel with the Master's thesis is possible but the amount should remain limited.

2.6 Study Plan

Students are supposed to compile a study plan outlining which modules they plan to take in which semester and to have it approved by the scientific coordinator. A personal study plan is key to a successful participation in the program. The scientific coordinator will help to establish such a plan. Table 4 contains an *example* study plan; note that it is not binding (legally binding are only the conditions detailed above).

Note that starting in the spring will not necessarily mean that semesters 1 and 2 can be inversed since some of the lectures in the spring semester heavily depend on contents of Likelihood and Regression I and Clinical Biostatistics and hence it will be

Table 4: Example study plan for the Master Program in Biostatistics at the University of Zurich.

Semester 1 (fall)	29 ECTS	
	Likelihood and Regression I	7 ECTS
	Clinical Biostatistics	7 ECTS
	Good Statistical Practice	4 ECTS
	Introduction to Machine Learning (ML) in Biomedicine	3 ECTS
	Statistical Modeling	5 ECTS
	Elective at ETH	3 ECTS
Semester 2 (spring)	28 ECTS	
	Statistical Methods in Epidemiology	5 ECTS
	Likelihood and Regression II	4 ECTS
	Biostatistics Journal Club	4 ECTS
	Statistical Practice in Clinical Research	6 ECTS
	Analysis of Longitudinal Data	3 ECTS
	Statistical Methods in Infectious Disease Epidemiology	3 ECTS
	Elective at ETH	3 ECTS
Semester 3 (fall)	33 ECTS	
	Master's thesis	30 ECTS
	Master's exam	3 ECTS
	90 ECTS	

difficult to take them before those. **As a result starting the program in the spring can lead to longer study times.**

2.7 Performance controls

Each module is graded. Criteria for grading are defined by the responsible of the module. In general, performance controls for courses are written exams of normally 60-120 minutes. Moreover, students usually have to fulfill certain conditions concerning exercises, homework or presentations in order to be admitted to the exam. These conditions are an integral part of the performance control, failing them will lead to failure of the module. Students have passed a performance control if their grade is at least 4 (on the scale from 1 for very unsatisfactory to 6 for excellent, half grades are possible) or if it is passed on the pass/fail scale. The 3 ECTS credit points for the Master's exam are awarded if the presentation of the Master's thesis is judged satisfactory and if the

student shows sufficient mastery of the subject in the discussion of the presentation. A performance control, which has not been passed, can be repeated once. If a presentation, a report or the Master's thesis is unsatisfactory, a new subject must be chosen for the second attempt. A repeated performance control for a course may be an oral exam. Note that failing an elective module twice has no further consequences except the transcript showing the failures. Failing a compulsory module twice leads to expulsion from the program. Exams can only be repeated in case of failures but not to improve the grade.

Examinations take place in calendar weeks 3–5 for courses of the fall semester (i.e. approximately two weeks after Christmas break) and calendar weeks 25 and 26 (i.e. approximately two weeks after the end of the spring semester lecture period) for courses of the spring semester. Repetitions for failed or missed exams (e.g. due to illness) for courses of the fall semester take place in calendar weeks 25–27. Repetitions for failed or missed exams for courses of the spring semester take place in calendar weeks 35–36, (i.e., approximately last week of August and first week of September).

More information on grades, repetitions, awarding of ECTS credit points and the examination process are described in the Framework Academic Regulations of the Faculty of Science.

3 Admission

The Master Program in Biostatistics at UZH is a specialized master program, i.e., potential students come from very diverse backgrounds. Therefore, everyone has to apply to pursue the program. Applications will in a **first step** be evaluated by the admissions committee of the master's program (details in Section 3.2.1). Depending on the student's background the admissions committee decides that the candidate is recommended for one of the following four possibilities:

- Admission without additional requirements: The student will be able to start the program immediately.
- Admission with additional conditions as detailed in the prerequisites (Section 3.1). The additional courses have to be passed within the time granted for the master's study. If these requirements are not fulfilled, no degree will be awarded.
- Admission with a preparatory year. The additional courses have to be passed within the first year of studies at UZH. During this year, no compulsory modules of the master's program can be taken, elective modules can be completed to a limited amount. After successfully completing the first year, admission to the master's program is granted automatically.
- No admission.

In a **second step** those applicants who have been selected by the admissions committee submit their documents to the Admissions Office of UZH. In this step degrees and documents will be formally evaluated before registration, hence only for this step certified copies are necessary and an application fee is required (details in Section 3.2.2).

3.1 Prerequisites

For admission to the program a university degree (bachelor or master), which includes at least introductions to probability and statistics [9 ECTS], analysis [6 ECTS], linear algebra [3 ECTS], and Biology/Biomedicine [6 ECTS] is required. A detailed list of topics that students are expected to have covered previously is given in the Appendix. It will be assumed that students have an active knowledge of these subjects in all compulsory and many of the statistical elective modules of the program. Most graduates from bachelor programs in biology/biomedicine, psychology, computer science, data science, mathematics, statistics, econometrics, and physics will meet or almost meet these requirements. In case an applicant does not meet all requirements, these may be imposed as conditions in addition to the master program's requirements depending on the exact content of each applicant's bachelor (or master) coursework. These can be fulfilled in parallel to the program. The additional requirements could consist of courses taught in German, but the corresponding exams are usually also offered in En-

glish. Generally, admission is “sur dossier”, i.e. taking into account grades, personal statement, and similar aspects.

Additionally, some proof that the level of English will be sufficient to follow the lectures is required, as specified in →[UZHs language requirements](#) ; this is equivalent to the international C1 language level (mother tongue, previous studies in an English speaking country, secondary education in English at Swiss Matura level, TOEFL, etc.).

Most of the courses in the program will be complemented by exercises containing statistical analyses for which the statistical software R (→www.r-project.org) has to be used. Sufficient knowledge in R is presumed from the start of the program. It is strongly recommended to obtain a working knowledge of R before the start of the program even though no formal proof of this is required. The scientific coordinator can help in finding an appropriate course in R if desired.

Students with degrees from Universities of Applied Sciences (Fachhochschulen, FH) in relevant disciplines can apply for this master, as for any other master at UZH, but the minimum average grade required is 5.0 (based on the Swiss Grading System). As for every other master’s program they can be admitted provided that the admission to a master’s program in the discipline corresponding to the Bachelor would not imply more than 30 ECTS credit points additional course requirements. Every FH-Student will have to fulfill additional requirements not exceeding 60 ECTS credit points, exact requirements will be decided by the admissions committee on a case-by-case basis.

3.2 Application

The application for the Master Program in Biostatistics at UZH is a two-step procedure:

1. Application to the admissions committee of the master’s program (no fee, non-legalized copies of documents are sufficient).
2. Only if admitted in the first step by the admissions committee: application to the Admissions Office of UZH (application fee, legalized copies or originals are necessary).

A simplified procedure is offered for students currently enrolled at UZH (Section 3.3).

3.2.1 First step

To apply to the admissions committee of the Master Program in Biostatistics at UZH one needs to compile the following documents:

- →[application form](#)
- motivation letter
- complete CV

- complete set of transcripts and diplomas (non-legalized copies are sufficient in the first step)
- detailed description of all undergraduate (and graduate) mathematical/statistical classes (not only the title but at least a table of contents, ideally with number of total contact hours and as much information as possible on the grading system for international applicants)
- proof of a sufficient level in English (where applicable)
- one letter of recommendation (sent directly to masterbiostat@ebpi.uzh.ch)
- finance plan (containing costs vs. income, e.g. using budget sheets from Google Docs)
- optional: any additional information that might be relevant for the evaluation of the application (e.g. scientific or technical publications or awards, previous graduate studies, professional experience, reference letters etc.)

Candidates send their **complete application in one single pdf file plus the application form in xls format** by email to the address masterbiostat@ebpi.uzh.ch. Applications containing more than these two or different types of documents are not accepted.

For fall semester enrollment applications are expected by February 15, for spring semester enrollment by September 15. Single documents that are not available by the application deadline can be filed subsequently. It is recommended to start the program in the fall semester.

The admissions committee will evaluate all applications and roughly one month after the application deadline the candidate will be notified about the decision. Note again that the admissions committee can only recommend acceptance for the program to the Admissions Office of UZH (second step).

3.2.2 Second step

The final decision about a candidate's admission is taken by the Admissions Office of UZH after checking the documents. Each applicant admitted in the first step will receive an application form in English from the Admissions Office of UZH detailing a list of necessary documents and containing further information. Note again that one can only apply at the Admissions Office of UZH after one has been selected by the admissions committee of the Master Program in Biostatistics (first step). Fees are only payable at this second step of the application process.

If a candidate will need a visa in order to enter Switzerland it is important that the entire admission process can be completed in time. Towards this goal it is advantageous to check that one fulfills the language requirements (or to do/repeat a test in time) and to prepare necessary documents and legalized copies already before being notified by the admissions committee.

3.3 Application by UZH Students

The application for the Master Program in Biostatistics at UZH for students currently enrolled at UZH is a simplified procedure. A candidate enrolled at UZH needs to compile the following documents to apply to the admissions committee of the Master Program in Biostatistics:

- →application form
- complete CV
- complete set of transcripts and diplomas (non-legalized copies are sufficient)
- detailed description of all undergraduate (and graduate) mathematical/statistical classes (not only the title but a least a table of contents) for all non UZH or ETHZ lectures/classes
- proof of a sufficient level in English (where applicable)
- one letter of recommendation (sent directly to masterbiostat@ebpi.uzh.ch))
- optional: any additional information that might be relevant for the evaluation of the application (e.g. scientific or technical publications or awards, previous graduate studies, professional experience, reference letters etc.)

Candidates send their **complete application in *one* single pdf file plus the application form in xls format** by email to the address masterbiostat@ebpi.uzh.ch). Applications containing more than these two or different types of documents are not accepted.

Applications from current UZH students are evaluated continuously, nevertheless it is recommended to submit an application at the latest mid May/ mid December for a desired start semester in the fall/spring. It is recommended to start the program in the fall semester. The candidate is notified about the decision as soon as possible.

4 People

Faculty

Leonhard Held	Department of Biostatistics, Epidemiology, Biostatistics and Prevention Institute, University of Zurich Program Director
Torsten Hothorn	Department of Biostatistics, Epidemiology, Biostatistics and Prevention Institute, University of Zurich Managing Director
Mark Robinson	Institute of Molecular Life Sciences, University of Zurich

UZH Lecturers

Ulrike Held	Department of Biostatistics, Epidemiology, Biostatistics and Prevention Institute, University of Zurich
Samuel Pawel	Department of Biostatistics, Epidemiology, Biostatistics and Prevention Institute, University of Zurich
Hubert Rehrauer	Functional Genomics Center Zurich, University of Zurich, ETH Zurich
Malgorzata Roos	Department of Biostatistics, Epidemiology, Biostatistics and Prevention Institute, University of Zurich
Beate Sick	Department of Biostatistics, Epidemiology, Biostatistics and Prevention Institute, University of Zurich
Stefanie von Felten	Department of Biostatistics, Epidemiology, Biostatistics and Prevention Institute, University of Zurich

Staff

Manuela Kehl	Department of Biostatistics, Epidemiology, Biostatistics and Prevention Institute, University of Zurich Scientific coordinator
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Appendix

Prerequisites

Analysis (6 ECTS)

- sequences, series, convergence
- basic properties of functions (continuity, monotonicity, ...)
- differential and integral calculus (uni- and multivariate)
- Taylor's Theorem (uni- and multivariate)
- Landau's notation

Linear Algebra (3 ECTS)

- basic operations with vectors and matrices
- rank, determinant, positive definiteness, etc.
- linear combinations, linear independence, orthogonality
- inversion of matrices
- systems of linear equations and connection to matrices
- Cholesky factorization and other decompositions
- eigenvalues and eigenvectors

Probability (part of 9 ECTS)

- events, probabilities and conditional probabilities, independence
- random variables and random vectors
- uni- and multivariate density and distribution function
- expectation, variance, covariance
- expectation and variance of a function of a random variable or vector
- density of a function of a random variable ("change of variables")
- conditional distributions and conditional expectation
- density and distribution function of an i.i.d. sample of observations
- law of large numbers and central limit theorem

Statistics (part of 9 ECTS)

- descriptive statistics (sample mean, variance etc., some graphical displays)
- point estimation methods (MoM, MLE), bias
- concepts of tests of significance
- one- and two-sample standard tests
- interval estimation
- goodness of fit tests
- correlation and simple linear regression
- multivariate regression
- *one-way analysis of variance*

Biology/Biomedicine (6 ECTS), to be specified on a case-by-case basis

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Eva Furrer

Annina Cincera

Manuela Kehl

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Information:

www.biostat.uzh.ch

masterbiostat@ebpi.uzh.ch

Address:

University of Zurich

Master Program in Biostatistics

Hirschengraben 84

CH-8001 Zurich

