PUBLIC HEALTH, MASTER OF (M.P.H.)

Program accreditation
Council on Education for Public Health

Program goal
The mission of the VCU M.P.H. program is to engage students in an experiential and learner-centered environment, collaborate with public health partners in Central Virginia to promote health equity and community wellness and foster lifelong inquiry and discovery in interdisciplinary, translational research that improves human health.

The overall goal of the M.P.H. program is to educate students to become well-grounded in the essential knowledge, skills and attitudes of public health and demonstrate their ability to apply these essentials through course work, internships and the M.P.H. capstone project. This program is designed to provide students with the skills required to advance to positions as public health practitioners in a broad spectrum of positions and settings and who can perform the following:

1. Administer public health programs
2. Collect, analyze and evaluate public health data
3. Plan, implement and evaluate public health interventions
4. Apply results of evaluations and data analyses to policy development as necessary
5. Promote public health through educational campaigns

The structure of the program provides a framework for the progressive development of a mastery of the current state of the subject matter of public health and an ability to synthesize and apply this information to the identification of key areas of practice and research in public health. Students will develop educational competencies outlined by the M.P.H. program. These competencies cover the foundational knowledge necessary for a public health practitioner to both communicate the core of public health knowledge and express the design, results and interpretation of various public health interventions, evaluations, and data collection and analysis efforts to a variety of potential audiences.

Student learning outcomes
Student learning outcomes are monitored by the program faculty and center primarily around competencies for all students. Overall learning outcomes are as follows.

1. Integrated knowledge of public health: Students will demonstrate knowledge of the current elements of public health, at a level assessed by program faculty as competent or higher, according to the program rubric.
2. Demonstration of focused knowledge and skills: Students will demonstrate more detailed knowledge and applied skills in the individual area of scholarship, including familiarity with the research literature and the ability to evaluate and critique publications, at a level assessed by program faculty as competent or higher, according to the program rubric.
3. Development of competencies: Through program course work and applied experiences, students will develop competence in the discipline of public health as demonstrated through annual self-assessment of performance on the M.P.H. program competencies and faculty assessment of (1) student competence in semi-annual student reviews and (2) student performance in the program’s integrated learning experience, the capstone project.
4. Training in appropriate public health skills/knowledge: Through didactic study and two separate applied experiences in professional public health settings, students will gain knowledge and skills required to perform as public health practitioners and/or researchers.

The M.P.H. program trains students to develop educational competencies established by the program’s accrediting body, the Council on Education for Public Health. These competencies may be viewed at http://familymedicine.vcu.edu/epidemiology/mph/competencies/.

VCU Graduate Bulletin, VCU Graduate School and general academic policies and regulations for all graduate students in all graduate programs
The VCU Graduate Bulletin website documents the official admission and academic rules and regulations that govern graduate education for all graduate programs at the university. These policies are established by the graduate faculty of the university through their elected representatives to the University Graduate Council.

It is the responsibility of all graduate students, both on- and off-campus, to be familiar with the VCU Graduate Bulletin as well as the Graduate School website (http://www.graduate.vcu.edu) and academic regulations in individual school and department publications and on program websites. However, in all cases, the official policies and procedures of the University Graduate Council, as published on the VCU Graduate Bulletin and Graduate School websites, take precedence over individual program policies and guidelines.

Visit the academic regulations section for additional information on academic regulations for graduate students. (http://bulletin.vcu.edu/academicregs)

Degree candidacy requirements
A graduate student admitted to a program or concentration requiring a final research project, work of art, thesis or dissertation, must qualify for continuing master’s or doctoral status according to the degree candidacy requirements of the student’s graduate program. Admission to degree candidacy, if applicable, is a formal statement by the graduate student’s faculty regarding the student’s academic achievements and the student’s readiness to proceed to the final research phase of the degree program.

Graduate students and program directors should refer to the following degree candidacy policy as published in the VCU Graduate Bulletin for complete information and instructions.

Visit the academic regulations section for additional information on degree candidacy requirements. (http://bulletin.vcu.edu/academic-regps/grad/candidacy)

Graduation requirements
As graduate students approach the end of their academic programs and the final semester of matriculation, they must make formal application to graduate. No degrees will be conferred until the application to graduate has been finalized.
Graduate students and program directors should refer to the following graduation requirements as published in the Graduate Bulletin for a complete list of instructions and a graduation checklist.

Visit the academic regulations section for additional information on graduation requirements. (http://bulletin.vcu.edu/academic-regis/grad/graduation-info)

**Other information**

The M.P.H. program student handbook is available upon request.

**School of Medicine graduate program policies**

The School of Medicine provides policies applicable to all programs administratively housed in the school. Information on master’s programs is available elsewhere in this chapter of the Graduate Bulletin.

Apply online at sophas.org (http://www.sophas.org) and submit a VCU supplemental application following instructions available at sophas.org.

**Admission requirements**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree:</th>
<th>Semester(s) of entry:</th>
<th>Deadline dates:</th>
<th>Test requirements:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M.P.H.</td>
<td>Fall</td>
<td>Mar 15</td>
<td>GRE; TOEFL or IELTS for international students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to the general admission requirements of the VCU Graduate School (http://bulletin.vcu.edu/graduate/study/admission-graduate-study/admission-requirements), to be considered for admission, applicants must meet the following requirements:

1. Prior degree: Students must hold a bachelor’s degree from an accredited institution, with a minimum GPA of 3.0 on a 4.0 scale in all undergraduate and any other graduate study. Official copies of transcripts for all prior degrees earned must be submitted to the VCU Office of Graduate Admissions.
2. GRE: Current GRE test results (taken within the past five years), with scores at or above the 75th percentile preferred in all components of the exam (i.e., minimum scores of 159 quantitative, 157 verbal and 4.5 analytical writing).
3. TOEFL: International students must submit TOEFL or IELTS scores. Minimum TOEFL score is 600 (paper-based), 250 (computer-based) or 100 (Internet-based); IELTS minimum score is 7.0. The PTE is also accepted with a minimum score of 65. Test score requirements may be waived for international students who have received a medical degree (M.D.) in the U.S. Contact the program coordinator for more information.

Students must also submit the following materials with their applications:

1. Letters of recommendation from three individuals who can assess applicant qualifications for graduate school; at least one academic reference is required, but two are preferred. Most appropriate are letters from past professors or work supervisors.
2. Current version of curriculum vitae or resume. Include experience and/or education relevant to study in public health.
3. Personal statement covering the following issues in two to five pages:

   a. Description of the applicant’s career goals
   b. Why the applicant wishes to pursue an M.P.H. degree
   c. How an M.P.H. degree will help the applicant achieve her/his career goals
   d. Description of applicant’s particular areas of interest in public health (e.g., maternal and child health, epidemiology)
   e. Why VCU’s M.P.H. program best fits the student’s public health interests
   f. What applicant plans to do in the first few years after graduation

**Degree requirements**

The Master of Public Health program prepares students committed to public health careers in the public, private or nonprofit sectors. Public health works to prevent health problems in populations before these problems occur. The M.P.H. program provides a rigorous curriculum to help students develop the analytic and critical reasoning skills to improve population health. The program boasts experiential learning, a highly interactive environment, accessible and approachable faculty and student involvement in significant projects.

In addition to general VCU Graduate School graduation requirements (http://bulletin.vcu.edu/academic-regis/grad/graduation-info), a minimum of 45 credit hours of formal course work is required, including:

1. A practicum in year one
2. An internship, typically conducted in the summer between the first and second year
3. A 20-hour community-based learning experience
4. Attendance at public health seminars in years one and two
5. A capstone project planned and implemented in the second year of the program.

The M.P.H. program can be individualized to meet the varied needs and interests of students. The program offers many electives, allowing students to tailor the program to meet educational objectives, and it is flexible enough to accommodate students who enter the program with various backgrounds and experiences. Note that some elective courses may not be available in certain years or may require instructor permission for registration.

**Curriculum requirements**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Hours</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BIOS 543</td>
<td>Graduate Research Methods I</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIOS 544</td>
<td>Graduate Research Methods II</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPID 547</td>
<td>Applied Data Analysis Lab I</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPID 548</td>
<td>Applied Data Analysis Lab II</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPID 571</td>
<td>Principles of Epidemiology</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPID 580</td>
<td>Public Health Ethics</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPID 593</td>
<td>Foundations of the Public Health Profession</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPID 594</td>
<td>MPH Practicum</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPID 604</td>
<td>Principles of Environmental Health</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HCP 601</td>
<td>Introduction to Health Policy</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IPEC 501</td>
<td>Foundations of Interprofessional Practice</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBHD 605</td>
<td>Introduction to Social and Behavioral Health</td>
<td>3</td>
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</table>
Electives
Select a minimum of 12 credit hours of elective course work chosen according to the area(s) of interest in public health. These may include the following courses:

- BIOS 549  Spatial Data Analysis
- BIOS 571  Clinical Trials
- CCTR 630  Design Implications in Clinical Trials
- CCTR 631  Adaptive Clinical Trials
- EPID 600  Introduction to Public Health
- EPID 601  Contemporary Issues and Controversies in Public Health
- EPID 603  Public Health Policy and Politics
- EPID 604  Epidemiologic Methods
- EPID 622  Maternal and Child Health
- EPID 624  Chronic Disease Epidemiology
- EPID 646  Epidemiology of Psychiatric and Substance Use Disorders
- EPID 691  Special Topics
- EPID 692  Independent Study
- GRAD 614  Introduction to Grant Writing
- GRTY 501  Physiological Aging
- GRTY 510  Aging
- GRTY 603  Social Gerontology
- GRTY 604  Problems, Issues and Trends in Gerontology
- HEMS 505  Contemporary Issues in Health
- HEMS 550  Exercise, Nutrition and Weight Management
- HEMS 604  Nutrition for Health and Physical Activity
- HEMS 605  Psychology of Physical Activity
- HEMS 606  Psychosocial Aspects of Sport and Physical Activity
- HGEN 501  Introduction to Human Genetics
- HGEN 502  Advanced Human Genetics
- HGEN 620  Principles of Human Behavioral Genetics
- HSEP 601  Emergency Management: Response Planning and Incident Command
- HSEP 603  Risk Assessment
- HSEP 650  Public Health Preparedness
- PSYC 660  Health Psychology
- SBHD 608  Health Communication
- SBHD 609  Research Methods in Social and Behavioral Health I
- SBHD 611  Health Literacy
- SBHD 630  Theoretical Foundations of Social and Behavioral Health
- SBHD 632  Health Disparities and Social Justice
- SBHD 636  Community-based Participatory Research
- SBHD 637  Program Evaluation
- SBHD 638  Applications in Qualitative Research Methods

Integrative program requirements
- EPID 693  Public Health Internship
- EPID 694  MPH Capstone Project

Total graduate credit hours required (minimum) 45

Public health internship: The public health internship is a supervised experience designed to expose M.P.H. students to a real-world public health practice setting, such as a governmental public health agency or nonprofit organization, requiring them to integrate classroom knowledge and skills in practical applications in a professional environment. Each student intern works with a practice site supervisor who assigns tasks, instructs the student in new skills and evaluates the student's progress. Students work a minimum of 180 hours in a professional public health organization.

Capstone project: The culminating work in the M.P.H. program is the capstone project. The project is a practical experience that allows the student to apply what has been learned in the didactic components of the curriculum to a focused project. The goal is to enhance the student's academic experience through the application of public health concepts and skills in a supervised experience. Students are required to synthesize the literature; analyze, assess or evaluate quantitative or qualitative data; and in general apply theory and integrate knowledge gained and principles in situations that approximate some aspects of professional practice. With this mentored experience, students are able to both broaden their skills and hone their proficiency in a specific area of public health. The major product of this culminating experience is expected to vary depending on the educational goals of the student, but could include one of the following:
1. Manuscript suitable for publication in a peer-reviewed journal
2. Comprehensive disease-related report and analysis
3. Policy analysis report
4. Needs assessment for a specific population
5. Development, implementation and analysis of target population surveys
6. Program evaluation

At a minimum, the capstone experience will require the integration of multiple major competencies used by a public health professional. In fulfilling the capstone requirement, each candidate must: (a) submit a formal written paper of sufficient depth and rigor and (b) satisfactorily complete a poster presentation of the project chosen as the basis for the written paper at an appropriate venue (e.g., research forum, refereed conference, etc.) approved by the M.P.H. program director.

Non-didactic program requirements

In addition to course work, students are required to complete the following noncurricular requirements for the M.P.H. degree:

1. Attendance at 12 public health seminars
2. Twenty hours of community-based service-learning

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Program website: epidemiology.vcu.edu/education/mph (http://www.epidemiology.vcu.edu/education/mph)