PUBLIC HEALTH, MASTER OF (M.P.H.) WITH A CONCENTRATION IN EPIDEMIOLOGY

Program accreditation
Council on Education for Public Health

Program goal
The mission of the VCU M.P.H. program is to train future public health professionals to be innovative and effective leaders dedicated to improving public health and advancing health equity.

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. The epidemiology concentration is designed to provide students with the skills required to advance to a broad spectrum of positions as public health researchers, epidemiologists or data analysts who can perform the following:

1. Collect, analyze and evaluate public health data
2. Select and apply epidemiologic methods appropriate for the disease topic
3. Plan, implement and evaluate public health interventions
4. Apply results of research and data analyses to policy or research development, as appropriate
5. Effectively communicate results of research a wide variety of audiences

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 on the department’s website (https://familymedicine.vcu.edu/epidemiology/epidemiology-graduate-programs/mph-program/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 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.

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.

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.

Other information

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

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>Feb. 15</td>
<td>TOEFL or IELTS for international students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to 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 (health, social or basic sciences preferred) 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. Standardized tests: International students must submit TOEF, IELTS or PTE scores. Minimum TOEFL score is 600 (paper-based), 250 (computer-based) or 100 (Internet-based); IELTS minimum score is 7.0; PTE minimum score is 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, community engagement)
   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 mission of the M.S. in Public Health program is to provide exceptional public health training; conduct cutting-edge, translational research; promote health equity and community wellness; and foster lifelong inquiry and discovery that improve human health. The program prepares students committed to public health careers in the public, private or nonprofit sectors through a rigorous curriculum that helps students develop analytic and critical-thinking skills to improve population health. The M.P.H. 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-cons/grad/graduation-info/), a minimum of 45 credit hours of formal course work is required, including:

1. 25 credits minimum of core didactic course work, including
   a. A three-credit internship, typically conducted in the summer between the first and second year
   b. A minimum three-credit capstone project planned and implemented in the second year of the program
2. Nine credits minimum of concentration course work
3. 11 credits minimum of concentration elective course work

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>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BIOS 543</td>
<td>Graduate Research Methods I</td>
<td>3</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 604</td>
<td>Principles of Environmental Health</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPID 693</td>
<td>Public Health Internship</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPID 694</td>
<td>MPH Capstone Project</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HPCR 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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Required additional courses

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Hours</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BIOS 544</td>
<td>Graduate Research Methods II</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPID 548</td>
<td>Applied Data Analysis Lab</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPID 606</td>
<td>Epidemiologic Methods</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Elective courses

Select a minimum of 11 credit hours of course work chosen according to the area(s) of interest in public health. These may include the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BIOS 535</td>
<td>Behavioral Measurement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIOS 549</td>
<td>Spatial Data Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIOS 571</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>CCTR 630</td>
<td>Design Implications in Clinical Trials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCTR 631</td>
<td>Adaptive Clinical Trials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPID 594</td>
<td>MPH Practicum</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 major competencies used by a public health professional. In this mentored experience, students are able to both broaden their skills and hone their proficiency in a specific area of public health practice. With this mentored experience, students are able to both expand their skills and hone their proficiency in a specific area of public health practice. 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.

| Total Hours | 45 |

The minimum number of graduate credit hours required for this degree is 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 major competencies used by a public health professional. In this mentored experience, students are able to both broaden their skills and hone their proficiency in a specific area of public health practice. 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:

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Students are expected to maintain satisfactory academic progress on the capstone project; such progress entails completing the capstone project according to the timeline included in the student’s proposal for the capstone project (typically in no more than one-to-two semesters). Exceptions beyond this time limit must be approved by the student’s adviser and the graduate program director, based on the student’s submission to the adviser of a written explanation for the delay in progress. This written explanation must include a plan for completing the project, developed by the student with adviser input and approval.

Satisfactory academic progress
Satisfactory academic progress in the M.P.H. program may be assessed on multiple factors. These factors include professional conduct including communication with the adviser about capstone project progress or other relevant work; honor policy adherence and academic conduct; and continuous enrollment compliance. Students are notified of faculty assessment of their progress and performance in the program via semi-annual advising letters provided after the fall and spring semesters. In addition, special advising letters may be issued outside of this cycle if additional guidance or notification of unsatisfactory academic progress is necessary.

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

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

M.D.-M.P.H. opportunity
The M.D.-M.P.H. program allows students to pursue both the M.D. and M.P.H. degrees using a coordinated program of study and apply a limited number of M.D. requirements toward fulfillment of requirements for the M.P.H. See the dual degree program page (http://bulletin.vcu.edu/graduate/dual-degree-opps/md-mph/) for additional details.

M.S.W.-M.P.H. opportunity
Through a collaborative program between the VCU School of Social Work and the Division of Epidemiology in the VCU School of Medicine’s Department of Family Medicine and Population Health, students complete a three-year full-time program of study, including summer course work, to obtain the Master of Social Work and Master of Public Health degrees. This dual degree program prepares graduates to work with individuals, families, groups, communities and/or organizations; to advocate for social, health care and economic justice in a diverse and multicultural society; and to promote physical and mental health across the life course. Program details (http://bulletin.vcu.edu/graduate/dual-degree-opps/msw-mph/) can be found in the dual degree opportunities section of this Bulletin.

Pharm.D.-M.P.H. opportunity
The Pharm.D.-M.P.H. program allows students to pursue both the Pharm.D. and M.P.H. degrees using a coordinated program of study and apply a limited number of Pharm.D. requirements toward fulfillment of requirements for the M.P.H. See the dual degree program page (http://bulletin.vcu.edu/graduate/dual-degree-opps/pharmd-mph/) for additional details.

Contact
Juan Lu, Ph.D., M.P.H., M.D.