

# 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://sph.vcu.edu/education/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** 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) ([http://www.sophas.org/](http://www.sophas.org)) and submit a VCU supplemental application following instructions available at [sophas.org](http://www.sophas.org).

## Admission requirements

Degree:	Semester(s) of entry:	Deadline dates:	Test requirements:
M.P.H.	Fall	Feb 15	TOEFL or IELTS for international students
	Spring	Nov 1	

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 (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 TOEFL, 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. Exceptions to the English proficiency requirement can be found on the International Admissions webpage (<https://admissions.vcu.edu/apply-to-vcu/international/graduate/>). Please contact the M.P.H. education administrator with any questions.

Students must also submit the following materials with their applications:

1. Letters of recommendation from two individuals who can assess applicant's qualifications for graduate school; at least one academic reference is recommended. 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 Master of 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-reasoning 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-regs/grad/graduation-info/>), a minimum of 45 credit hours of formal course work is required, including:

1. 26 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. 10 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

Course	Title	Hours
<b>Required core courses</b>		
BIOS 543	Graduate Research Methods I	3
EPID 571	Principles of Epidemiology	3
EPID 580	Public Health Ethics	1
EPID 593	Foundations of the Public Health Profession	2
EPID 604	Principles of Environmental Health	3
EPID 693	Public Health Internship	3
EPID 694	MPH Capstone Project	3
HCPR 601	Introduction to Health Policy	3
IPEC 563	Interprofessional Complex Care Coordination	2
SBHD 605	Introduction to Social and Behavioral Health	3
<b>Required additional courses</b>		
BIOS 544	Graduate Research Methods II	3
EPID 548	Applied Data Analysis Lab	3
EPID 606	Epidemiologic Methods	3
<b>Elective courses</b>		
Select a minimum of 10 credit hours of course work chosen according to the area(s) of interest in public health. These may include the following:		10
BIOS 535	Behavioral Measurement	
BIOS 549	Spatial Data Analysis	

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 620	Cancer Epidemiology
EPID 622	Maternal and Child Health
EPID 623	Injury and Violence Epidemiology
EPID 628	Public Health Program Planning and Evaluation
EPID 645	Public Health Genomics
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 611	Data Science I
HGEN 620	Principles of Human Behavioral Genetics
HSEP 601	Foundations in Emergency Management
HSEP 603	Risk Assessment
HSEP 650	Public Health Preparedness
PSYC 660	Health Psychology
SBHD 612	Fundamentals of Cancer Health Equity
SBHD 613	Community-engaged Research and Cancer Disparities
SBHD 630	Theoretical Foundations of Social and Behavioral Health
SBHD 632	Health Disparities and Social Justice
SBHD 636	Community-based Participatory Research
SBHD 638	Applications in Qualitative Research Methods
SOCY 510	Domestic and Sexual Violence in Social Context
SOCY 524	Aging and the Minority Community
SOCY 603	Seminar in Population Studies
SOCY 607	Seminar in Racial and Ethnic Relations in America

SOCY 611	Studies in the Community
SOCY 620	Seminar in Criminology
SOCY 624	Community and Community Services for the Elderly
SOCY 632	Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence: Medical Practice and Policy
SOCY 633	Application of the Policy Process to Issues of Violence
SOCY 634	Social Contexts of Childhood and Violence
SOCY 635	Theorizing Gender Violence
SOCY 645	The Sociology of Health and Illness
URSP 521	Introduction to Geographic Information Systems
URSP 621	Introduction to Geographic Information Systems
URSP 622	Community Socioeconomic Analysis Using GIS
URSP 625	Spatial Database Management and GIS Modeling

**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 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.

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

Students who complete the requirements for this concentration will receive a Master of Public Health.

## 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-ops/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 VCU School of 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-ops/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-ops/pharmd-mph/>) for additional details.

### Contact

Juan Lu, Ph.D., M.P.H., M.D.  
Professor and graduate program director  
[jlu1@vcu.edu](mailto:jlu1@vcu.edu)  
(804) 828-9786

### Additional contact

Katherine Peterman, M.P.H.  
M.P.H. education administrator  
[petermankb@vcu.edu](mailto:petermankb@vcu.edu)  
(804) 628-2868