

School of Public Health, University at Albany

DOCTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH (Dr.P.H.)

HEGIS code: 1214
Program Code: 19865

Program Leading to the Doctor of Public Health Degree (DrPH)

The mission of the University at Albany's DrPH degree program is to prepare students for leadership roles in public health practice in governmental agencies, community-based organizations and other settings. Students acquire analytic, conceptual, and administrative skills while gaining a thorough understanding of the scientific, political, social, cultural, ethical and economic contexts within which public health problems occur and are addressed. As the terminal professional degree for public health practice (comparable to the M.D. as the terminal professional degree for medical practice) it provides rigorous training. The University at Albany's School of Public Health, because of its strong partnership with the New York State Department of Health, is uniquely positioned to offer doctoral training in public health practice, combining a strong academic background in all the core disciplines of public health with a wealth of opportunities to gain program experience in one of the largest public health agencies in the world.

Admission Requirements

Students will be admitted on a competitive basis. Only applicants who meet the following requirements will be considered for admission to the program:

- MPH, or other master's degree in health, social science, or a related field, from an accredited American college or university or a well-regarded foreign college or university
- At least two years work experience in public health or related field

Note: Applicants without a master's degree who are interested in the DrPH program should first apply to the Master of Public Health program. Qualified students in the MPH program may apply to the DrPH program during their last year of MPH study.

Note: Students with a master's degree other than an MPH will be required to take all MPH core courses not previously taken.

Application Process

To apply to the DrPH program, students must submit the following:

- Application for Graduate Admission, including application fee
- Transcripts from all colleges/universities attended
- TOEFL scores (international students only)

- 3 letters of recommendation from academic/professional sources (one letter must be from work experience, and one from an academic source if the applicant has been a student within the past five years)
- Personal statement describing previous professional experience, intended area of DrPH concentration, and specific educational interests and career goals in public health. The student must demonstrate commitment to the practice of public health. The personal statement should be 2-3 pages, with at least one page discussing applicable public health or related work experience.

Note: GRE and/or MCAT scores are not required. However, if the applicant has taken the GRE or MCAT, a copy of the test results should be included in the application.

The DrPH Admissions Committee will evaluate each application based on the applicant's demonstrated ability to excel at graduate work and evidence, contained in the application, that the applicant has clearly defined career goals that can be advanced by completing the DrPH program.

Interview

Applicants who pass an initial review of their completed application will be invited to be interviewed by the DrPH Admissions Committee and to meet with potential advisors/mentors. These interviews are required; telephone interviews may be arranged under special circumstances.

Student Advisement

After acceptance of admission offer, all students will be assigned a First Year Advisor within their area of concentration who will guide their early course selections and discuss practicum/dissertation plans. Efforts will be made to match students and advisors with similar interests. Students will meet with that advisor to assess their academic and practice background and goals in order to plan an individualized course of study tailored to the student's interests and goals.

By the end of the first year, the student transitions to a DrPH Dissertation Advisor, who will guide the student throughout the formulation of the DrPH *capstone project and* dissertation. The DrPH Dissertation Advisor does not have to be identified prior to admission. Because of the practice orientation of the degree, SPH faculty who are New York State Department of Health employees will play a key role in serving as DrPH advisors, both First Year and DrPH Dissertation advisors.

Preliminary Assessment

Accepted students will undergo a preliminary assessment by their First Year Advisor, *in consultation with the DrPH Program Director*, during their first semester to determine how well the student meets the MPH competencies and to identify areas in which the student may require additional preparation. A review of master's-level coursework and related work experience will be completed. *Paperwork will be completed to transfer any appropriate courses from previous*

graduate study. After the assessment, the advisor may recommend readings or online modules to supplement knowledge. For example, if the student is found to be deficient in the MPH competencies in epidemiology, he/she will be assigned readings or other supplemental work. *This may be desirable, for instance, if a master's level course to be transferred was taken years earlier and is deemed lacking in recent developments in the field.* The DrPH Oversight Committee will provide guidance to First Year Advisors and provide them with appropriate resources to assess and advise students. *The assessment process will assist the student and advisor with determining the student's preparedness to take the Qualifying Exam at the end of the first year.*

Degree Requirements

The program leading to the DrPH degree requires the following: a minimum of 48 credit hours of course work; a passing grade on the Comprehensive Examination; satisfaction of the Research Tool requirement, 12 hours of practicum; and completion of a 15-credit capstone project, which includes the DrPH dissertation. *In addition, completion of the Northeast Public Health Leadership Institute program is strongly recommended.*

Students may apply for admission with advanced standing, based on previous graduate work, and be allowed a maximum of 30 credits for courses applicable to the DrPH. Of the 75 total credits required for the degree, at least 39 credits must be completed at the University at Albany. Courses presented *for transfer* must be appropriate to the student's graduate program, must be graduate-level courses and have been given by an accredited institution authorized to grant graduate degrees. Courses presented must be completed with grades of B or better. Courses presented for transfer credit will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

Part-time study is permitted. In accordance with University guidelines, all students enrolled in doctoral programs must maintain continuous registration for each fall and spring session (except for periods of official leave of absence prior to candidacy) until they have completed all program requirements. *Minimum registration consists of 3 credits of approved course work or practicum, or 1 credit of registration for dissertation load after advancement to candidacy (899 courses only).*

ACADEMIC PHASE (48 credits)

MPH core courses (15 credits)

Introductory graduate-level courses in the 5 core areas of public health (epidemiology, biostatistics, health policy and management, social and behavioral science, environmental health) or their equivalent:

- EPI 501 Principles and Methods of Epidemiology (3 credits)
- EPI/STA 552 Principles of Statistical Inference (3 credits)
- HPM 500 Health Care Organization, Delivery and Financing (3 credits)
- HPM 525 Social and Behavioral Aspects of Public Health (3 credits)
- EHS 590 Introduction to Environmental Health (3 credits)

Note: Equivalent MPH core courses may have been completed as part of a previous graduate program, in which case the appropriate credits may be transferred in to the

DrPH program. Students with a master's degree other than an MPH degree, who have not previously taken these MPH courses, will be required to take them.

DrPH core courses (9 credits)

EPI/STA 553 Principles of Statistical Inference II (3)
HPM 641 Organization and Management in Health Institutions (3)
HPM 647 Program Evaluation (3)

Area of Concentration (18 credits)

Social Behavior and Community Health

HPM 520 Fundamentals of Research Design (3)
HPM 521 Introduction to Family and Community Health (3)
 or HPM 530 Introduction to Maternal & Child Health
 or HPM 625 Introduction to Public Health in Aging
HPM 627 Public Health Education: Targeting Social, Organizational and Behavioral Factors to Promote Health (3)
Advanced methods course in program design, implementation and/or evaluation as approved by advisor (3)
Choice of two 600 level or above electives in any department as approved by advisor (6)

Health Policy and Management

HPM 501 Health Policy Analysis and Management (3)
HPM 511 Economic Analysis for Health Policy and Management (3)
HPM 650 Strategy and Leadership Applications in Health Management (3)
Advanced methods course in policy analysis or management as approved by advisor (3)
Choice of two 600 level or above electives in any department as approved by advisor (6)

Epidemiology

EPI 502 Principles and Methods of Epidemiology II (3)
EPI 601 General Topics in Epidemiological Methods (3)
Advanced level methods course in epidemiology, biostatistics or another department as approved by advisor (3)
Two 600 level or above Epidemiology courses as approved by advisor (6)
Choice of one 600 level or above elective in any department as approved by advisor (3)

Biostatistics:

STA 554 Introduction to the Theory of Statistics I (3)
STA 555 Introduction to the Theory of Statistics II (3)
STA 558 Methods of Data Analysis I (3)
STA 559 Methods of Data Analysis II (3)
Choice of two 600 level or above electives in any department as approved by advisor (6)

Note: Individuals who took equivalent courses during their master's degree program may transfer those credits, up to a maximum of 30 credits, or substitute other advanced courses with approval of advisor. All students must complete at least 39 graduate credits

in residence at the University at Albany. Students are encouraged to take 700-level courses, when possible.

Additional Course Requirements (6 credits)

- All DrPH students are required to enroll in SPH 701, Topics for Public Health Practice (3 credits). Topics to include: ethics, research design, sampling, program evaluation, proposal development, etc. (Note: although students register for 3 credits during one semester, attendance is required for 1-1/2 hours per week during two semesters.)
- All DrPH students must enroll in SPH 780, Doctoral Seminar in Public Health (0 credit), one semester for every semester they register for a doctoral practicum and must attend at least half of the sessions during their first year.
- EPI 514 Computer Programming for Data Management and Analysis in Public Health (3 credits). This course fulfills the research tool requirement.

NEPHLI Training

Preparing students to become leaders in public health is a key aspect to the DrPH program. It is strongly recommended that all students enroll in the Northeast Public Health Leadership Institute (NEPHLI) as part of their DrPH curriculum.

NEPHLI is a year-long experiential program that builds and improves the leadership skills of current and future public health practitioners, providing participating Scholars with opportunities to gain practical experience from experts in a variety of fields. Topics include: influencing others, measuring and improving public health performance, developing collaborative relationships and partnerships, team building, group problem solving, responding to the needs for cultural diversity and competence, and addressing the training needs of the public health workforce. Scholars also learn to evaluate their own potential for leadership and their leadership styles. Curricula are tailored to meet the needs of Scholars and address issues important to their personal growth and to building healthier communities. The program consists of three retreats and ongoing learning through distance learning and networking. The retreats are held for five days in July, three days in October, and three days in April (July and April retreats are held at the Rensselaerville Institute in Rensselaerville, New York located about 45 minutes from Albany, and the October retreat at the Whispering Pines Conference Center near Providence, Rhode Island. Both are spacious wooded retreat centers that offer perfect learning environments.

PRACTICUM PHASE (12 credits)

Twelve credits of DrPH practicum will be required. Students should use the practicum experiences to acquire a broad exposure to public health by completing practicum rotations in more than one setting. Practicum rotations should also demonstrate integration of multiple disciplines.

The intent of the practicum is to help the student develop and demonstrate leadership, independence and originality in a project with a significant public health impact.

Examples could include: design and carry out an epidemiological study; design and implement a surveillance system; or lead a workgroup developing a strategic plan.

The practicum rotations will be supervised by both the student's faculty advisor and a mentor, who is a public health practitioner either with a doctoral degree or with substantial expertise and experience in the field.

Evaluation of practicum:

- Before the placement, the student, mentor and advisor will agree on, and sign, a written practicum registration plan. This plan will specify which competencies will be developed during the rotation and how the practicum will go beyond an MPH-level internship
- One month review (completed by student, mentor and advisor together) to confirm placement is working as planned or to make changes to meet student's and agency's needs
- Formal feedback will be provided by the mentor, with a copy to the advisor, on at least a monthly basis
- Final assessment will consist of a paper and presentation in SPH 780, Doctoral Seminar in Public Health. The paper will describe the project's background, methods, and outcome. For the presentation, the faculty mentor and advisor must be in attendance.

Students must be registered for practicum credit (SPH 790) during the time of their rotation.

RESEARCH TOOL

The research tool requirement for the doctoral degree is met by satisfactorily demonstrating computer literacy. Satisfactory completion of EPI 514 (i.e. a grade of B or better) fulfills this requirement.

COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION

A comprehensive examination will be required after all DrPH coursework is completed and must be passed before the Capstone Project is begun. The exam will consist of two halves: general and track-specific, which will be graded separately. The DrPH Qualifying Exam Committee will administer and grade the exam. The exam will be graded honors/pass/fail. The student must pass both halves and, if necessary, can retake either or both halves once, within one year. A second failure of either or both parts will result in the student being dismissed from the program.

CAPSTONE PROJECT AND DISSERTATION (15 credits)

The Capstone Project will be a methodologically sound, substantial practice-oriented project in which the student puts existing knowledge into practice and which becomes the basis for the student's doctoral dissertation. This can be an extension of the in-concentration practicum. Student will be advised throughout the Capstone Project by a DrPH dissertation committee

which will consist of three to five people, and must include the mentor; a faculty member from within the student's area of concentration; and a faculty member from another discipline. To conform to University at Albany requirements, the chair of the dissertation committee must hold an unqualified appointment at the University. The chair and two other members must hold an earned doctorate or full professorship. Two members must be faculty of the School of Public Health and the third member should have an academic appointment external to the School of Public Health. If the dissertation project is conducted in a public health practice setting with a mentor that does not meet the degree or faculty requirements, it will be necessary for the committee to include a fourth member. The doctoral committee must be formally approved by the Director of Professional Programs.

The Capstone Project should be integrative, just as the coursework and qualifying exam are. Students are to write a proposal describing: how the project meets the School of Public Health's DrPH competencies; the public health significance of the project; detailed description of the project itself; and how the project is integrative and multidisciplinary. The proposal should be a minimum of 10 pages, excluding the bibliography. There will be an open meeting with faculty and the student's dissertation committee at which the student must defend the proposal.

Students will register for SPH 898 before admission to candidacy. After admission to candidacy they will register for SPH 899.

Assessment of Capstone Project and Dissertation

- Per University guidelines, doctoral students must have a dissertation committee to guide their dissertation project and to approve each stage of the process. Responsibility for the final evaluation and acceptance of a dissertation rests with the program faculty and the candidate's dissertation or doctoral committee. While students must be given an on-going evaluation of their dissertation by their dissertation committee as various sections are completed, final approval shall be given only to a completed work.
- The DrPH Dissertation will be a comprehensive description of the student's Capstone Project, suitable for publication, and must include an introduction, background, project description, discussion and results. The DrPH dissertation may consist of two publishable peer-reviewed journal articles based on the capstone project, accompanied by an introduction that includes a literature review and a summary and discussion that ties the papers together into a unified work.
- Each student will defend the dissertation in a final oral defense, which will be an approximately one hour long presentation followed by a question and answer period. The presentation and question and answer period will be open to all members of the University community, and this will be followed by a closed discussion between the student and his/her dissertation committee.

Admission to Candidacy:

A student will be admitted to candidacy for the degree of Doctor of Public Health upon completion of the following:

1. Satisfactory record in course and internship experiences (minimum grade of B in each course)
2. Satisfaction of the residence requirement
3. Satisfaction of the research tool requirement
4. Satisfactory performance on the comprehensive examination
5. Approval by the dissertation committee of the Capstone Project and Dissertation proposal

Evaluation of Students:

Throughout their tenure in the DrPH program, students will be evaluated based on the following:

Course grades: Students must maintain a minimum grade of B in each course. If a student receives a grade lower than a B in a required course they must re-take the course. If the low grade is in an elective, the course will not count toward the degree.

Qualifying exam (See section describing qualifying exam)

DrPH capstone project and dissertation: Students will be evaluated based on the written proposal and its defense, the DrPH dissertation and its oral defense (See section describing capstone project and dissertation)

DrPH Program Administration:

- **Director:** The Director of the DrPH Program will oversee the day-to-day functions of the DrPH program (including training advisors and providing them with assessment tools) and will field questions from prospective DrPH applicants and advise accordingly. This role will be held by an SPH faculty member on a rotating basis.
- **Oversight Committee:** The Oversight Committee will be comprised of a faculty representative from each participating track (Social Behavior and Community Health; Health Policy and Management; Epidemiology and Biostatistics), Department of Health liaison, Associate Dean for Academic Programs, current DrPH student, DrPH alumna/us, and Director, as ex-officio member. Track representatives may be either full-time School of Public Health faculty or Department of Health faculty members. The DOH liaison will be a DOH member of the faculty whose primary role is to represent the DOH collaboration, rather than their SPH track. The Oversight Committee will maintain the DrPH program's integrity by its continuous evaluation of the program. It will review curriculum regularly, and it will assist in identification of practicum opportunities.

- *Program Coordinator:* A staff member at the School of Public Health will serve in the role of DrPH Program Coordinator and will assist the DrPH Program Director with administrative functions related to the management of the program.
- *Standing Committees:*
 - Admissions and Practicum Committee:* Review all incoming DrPH applications, invite eligible applicants for an interview, interview them, and determine whether they should be admitted to the DrPH program. This committee will consist of two representatives from each of 3 DrPH tracks (Health Policy and Management; Social Behavior and Community Health; and Epidemiology), and one representative from the Biostatistics track, including significant representation by faculty who are public health practitioners.
 - Qualifying Exam Committee:* Construct the qualifying exam questions, administer, and grade exams. This committee will consist of one or more representatives from each of the 5 core public health disciplines (Health Policy and Management; Social Behavior and Community Health; Epidemiology; Biostatistics; and Environmental Health), including significant representation by faculty who are public health practitioners.

Conclusion

Making full use of the partnership with the NYS Department of Health, the revised DrPH program will provide a solid academic and professional grounding for students, preparing them to become leaders in public health practice. It is expected that faculty members who work full-time in the NYS Department of Health will serve as active participants in providing DrPH students with an enriching educational experience.

The unique attributes of the School of Public Health's new DrPH program will set UAlbany apart from DrPH programs at other schools of public health. In addition to our being one of the only accredited schools of public health with a strong partnership with a state health department, the proposed program also incorporates a highly successful leadership institute. The program will be a model of excellence in professional education in public health.