

MASTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH STUDENT HANDBOOK



SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY State University of New York

Last updated August 2019. Information in this handbook is subject to change at any time by official action of the University at Albany or School of Public Health.

INTRODUCTION

This handbook is a summary of key policies and procedures relevant to the Master of Public Health program. This handbook contains information about procedures and requirements to assist faculty and students in the MPH program at the School of Public Health. It should be used as a supplement to the University's Graduate Bulletin, the Schedule of Classes and other official publications of the University and School of Public Health.

It must be remembered, however, that programs, courses, and requirements do not remain static. They are frequently modified, hence official publications and this Handbook may lag slightly behind recent course revisions. It is essential that students maintain frequent and close contact with their advisors to ensure that all requirements are met.

The final responsibility for pursuing a successful graduate program, organizing and concluding its many parts, remains with each student. Each student has the primary responsibility for being aware of, and satisfying, the requirements and policies of his/her program. Students are encouraged to seek advice from their advisors, graduate program director, department chair and professors. The administrative manager is also a valuable resource on department, school, and university policies and procedures. Ultimately, the student is responsible for navigating a successful program schedule to the award of his/her degree.

The **Master of Public Health (MPH)** is an interdisciplinary professional degree in public health that builds on the unique partnership between the University at Albany and the New York State Department of Health to prepare you for a variety of career directions:

- Public health practice in a local, state, or national health department – in the US or overseas
- Practice in a non-governmental health organization, e.g. the Capital District African American Coalition on AIDS, the American Cancer Society, the International Red Cross/Red Crescent Society
- Work in healthcare administration at a hospital or other healthcare organization
- Work in other private-sector settings
- Pursue further study, such as a DrPH or PhD in a public health discipline, medical school, nursing school, or other health professional school

Because of the degree's interdisciplinary nature, MPH students take core courses in six areas:

- **Epidemiology**
- **Biostatistics**
- **Health Policy & Management**
- **Behavioral Science**
- **Environmental Health**
- **Biomedical Science**

Students are also required to complete SPH 681: Professional Practice in Public Health.

SPH 681: Professional Practice in Public Health: This course provides a foundation for the MPH degree and focuses on interdisciplinary concepts and skills essential to the practice of public health. It provides a foundation in the core principles and fundamentals of public health practice. It also addresses the professional skills needed to be a successful public health professional, including oral and written communication skills, advocacy, cultural competence, collaboration, negotiation, and interprofessional practice.

Advanced Courses and Electives: Beyond the core courses, students concentrate in one of the seven concentration areas. Each concentration includes track-specific requirements, as well as electives. (See **Plan of Study** for details relevant to each area of concentration).

Internships: A key feature of the MPH at the University at Albany is the internship experience, which provides excellent preparation for entry into the practice of public health and allows students to explore a variety of practice areas to help identify the kind of public health practice you are most excited about. Nine credits of internship (equivalent to 720 hours) are required in at least two different settings. Up to 6 credits of internship may be waived for students with significant past public health experience, completed before matriculation into the MPH program.

Integrative Learning Experience (ILE): Required of all MPH students, the ILE will demonstrate synthesis of the foundational and concentration competencies and result in a high-quality written product. ILEs will be specific to each of the concentrations and are incorporated in the concentration course requirements.

Credit Summary

A total of 51 credit hours are required to complete the MPH degree. Students should refer to the official program of study for the MPH degree in the University at Albany Graduate Bulletin at albany.edu/graduatebulletin/public_health_mph_degree.htm

- **21** credit hours of **Core Courses**
- **21** credit hours of **Concentration Requirements & Electives**
- **9** credit hours of **Internships**
- **Integrative Learning Experience**

Evaluation: Throughout your time in the MPH program, you will be evaluated based on the following:

Course grades: You must maintain a minimum GPA of 3.0 throughout your enrollment in the MPH program. You must also maintain a minimum GPA of 3.0 in the required 21 credits of core courses. If your GPA falls below that level, you will be placed on academic probation and may be advised to retake courses to improve your GPA.

Internship: Your performance during the internship will be assessed by your internship mentor and your academic advisor, based on your day-to-day functioning during the internship, achievement of the specific objectives of the internship, and products developed as part of the internship experience. Internships are graded on a Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory basis and a Satisfactory grade on all internships is required to remain in the program. An Unsatisfactory grade in your internship is grounds for dismissal from the program. Students are required to present on at least one internship experience at the annual Student Poster Day.

Please refer to the **SPH Experiential Learning Handbook** and the **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)** for detailed program requirements and additional information. These documents are available via the MPH Internships link at <http://www.albany.edu/sph/mpb.php>.

Poster Day Presentation Requirement: All MPH students are required to satisfactorily participate in the annual School of Public Health Poster Day, held at the end of April each academic year. While not formally a component of the internship course grade, degree clearance is contingent on meeting this requirement. Poster presentations typically occur at the end of the second year of study for MPH students. August graduates of the program have to fulfill this requirement and should plan accordingly.

Posters should be based on a credit-bearing internship experience obtained while enrolled in the MPH program. Posters may also be based on an internship waiver experience. Posters based on non-credit internships may be considered on a case-by-case basis

December graduates who have received a waiver for internship experience are required to present on their internship waiver experience at the end of the first year of study. Students with prior public health experience who anticipate graduating in December are encouraged to submit their waiver request during the fall semester, as waiver requests submitted in the spring semester may not be approved in time to present at the Student Poster Day.

In exceptional circumstances, December graduates who do not have an internship waiver or who have not completed an internship in the spring semester, may have this requirement waived pending approval of the internship director and faculty advisor. Please contact the internship director with any questions regarding this process.

Code of Conduct: Please review the University's *Community Rights & Responsibilities* guide for detailed information about academic integrity and other aspects of student conduct at UAlbany, found at <http://www.albany.edu/judicial/conduct.shtml>

Academic Advisement: Each student is assigned a faculty advisor in their area of concentration. The advisor will assist the student in making course selections and assure that he/she is following the appropriate program of study for the area of concentration. The faculty advisor will help the student choose internships, monitor the student's progress in the internships, and evaluate the student's internship products. Students and advisors should use the **plan of study** specific to their concentration to assist in planning the full course of study. All forms are available under **Academic Forms** on the SPH website albany.edu/sph/mph.php.

The academic advisor serves as the primary contact for all academic, course and career related questions and advice. The graduate program director and department chair are also available to meet with students regarding these issues.

Students may request a change in advisor at any time by contacting their department administrative manager.

Course Registration: Each semester students are required to meet with their faculty advisor to discuss which courses to take in the upcoming semester and to complete the *Academic Advisement* form. This form verifies that the student has met with his/her advisor and both agree on the schedule of classes for the semester and that the coursework aligns with the student's Plan of Study.

Students must present verification of advisement by the advisor to the department administrative manager or secretary to obtain advisement verification or permission numbers to register for classes. If a student wishes to add or drop a course after receiving their Advisement Verification Number (AVN), they must contact their advisor for verbal approval and then notify the department administrative manager.

Plan of Study: The *Plan of Study* form for the MPH program is designed to ensure that each student fulfills all requirements for the MPH program, including the specific requirements for the chosen area of concentration. Most entering full-time students will take core courses almost exclusively during the first semester. Several of the courses are only offered in the fall semester, so students should consider how scheduling of core courses impacts options to take more advanced courses later in the program of study. A student planning to concentrate in a given area should take the core courses in that area as early in the program of study as possible. The *Plan of Study* for each concentration is available electronically by clicking on **Academic Forms** in the yellow resource box located on the right at www.albany.edu/sph/mph.php. Students are encouraged to fill out the plan of study as they progress through the program to make sure they are meeting all requirements and are on track to graduate.

Academic Standing: To complete the program, MPH students must maintain a B average (3.0) in the core courses, as well as maintain a B average (3.0) in their overall program. Only courses completed with grades of A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C or S may be applied to graduate course requirements and credit requirements for graduate degrees. However, to maintain the 3.0 GPA requirement, any grade lower than a B must be balanced by a higher grade, or the course may be repeated for a higher grade. The grade of S is equivalent to a B or better, and U is equivalent to a failing grade. A grade of U in a required course is grounds for dismissal from the program.

The required core MPH courses are:

Epi 501	Principles and Methods of Epidemiology I	3 credits
Epi 551 OR Epi 552*	Principles of Statistical Inference I	3 credits
HPM 500	Health Care Organization, Financing & Delivery	3 credits
HPM 525	Social and Behavioral Aspects of Public Health	3 credits
EHS 590	Introduction to Environmental Health	3 credits
BMS 505	Biological Basis of Public Health	3 credits
SPH 681	Professional Practice in Public Health	3 credits

* Depending on concentration

Numerical conversions for letter grades can be found in the University at Albany Graduate Bulletin, albany.edu/graduatebulletin/requirements_degree.htm#graduate_grades. It is the responsibility of each student to be aware of the requirements for maintaining good academic standing.

Academic Probation: A student whose GPA falls below 3.0 will be placed on academic probation for up to two semesters. Students will be notified of their probationary status in writing by the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs. Students on academic probation are required to meet with their advisor and file an Academic Progress Plan with the department and Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, detailing the plan for improving their GPA.

Students generally have two semesters from the time they are originally placed on probation to achieve the required GPA of 3.0 and end academic probation. Satisfactory performance during each semester of academic probation (obtaining a 3.0 GPA for the semester) is required for continuation in the graduate program.

Students on academic probation are not allowed to participate in an internship.

Students on academic probation for two semesters may be subject to dismissal from the program. A student with severe academic deficiencies may be terminated from the program without a probation period.

Change of Concentration: Students can change concentrations within the MPH program by submitting a *Request for Change Form* to the new department/concentration no later than one month after completing 24 credits in the program (i.e. two semesters for full time students). Later requests must be discussed with the advisor, track chair, and Associate Dean for Academic Affairs. Students who are on academic probation at the time of a concentration change will remain on probation for at least one semester, pending improved performance in the new concentration.

Change of Degree Program: Students who wish to change degree programs (from MPH to MS or vice versa) within the first semester of study, must file a *Request for Change Form* with their department. Their completed file will be forwarded to the new program and will be subject to the standard admissions review. If the application is approved by the Admissions Committee, the student will be admitted to that degree.

Students who wish to change their degree program **after the first semester of study** are required to re-apply to the University through SOPHAS and pay the full application fee. If the department rejects the application, the student will have the option of staying in the program originally admitted to.

Transfer of Credits: In keeping with University policy, the MPH program allows up to 24 credits of graduate work completed at another institution to be accepted and applied toward the student's program. The courses must be either equivalent to UAlbany School of Public Health courses or appropriate for an elective, and must have a grade of B or higher. Students should complete a *Request for Transfer of Credits to a Graduate Program* form. This form must be submitted to the department with all required documentation. Students who wish to transfer in a course taken more than six years ago, should discuss this with the department administrative manager. Such requests require submission of the *Request for Waiver of Statute of Limitations Form* along with supported documentation. Once approved by Graduate Admissions, transfer credits will appear on the student's transcript.

Waiver of Course Credits: The waiver request will give credit for previous graduate work, but will **not** reduce the number of credits needed to complete the MPH degree. The student can apply for a course waiver, but will be required to take a more advanced course in the same department. For example, if a student wishes to take a 600 level course in place of a 500 level course, they can apply for a waiver of the required 500 level course and substitute the 600 level course. Application for a course waiver must be made by using the *MPH Request for Course Waiver* form and follow a similar procedure to that outlined above in "Transfer of Credit" for appropriate signatures.

Waiver of Internship Credits: See Experiential Learning Handbook for information on waiving internship credits.

Degree Application: Students who expect to complete all requirements for the MPH degree at the end of a particular semester must complete a degree application through their MyUAlbany portal. Information about this process and deadlines can be found at albany.edu/commencement/graduation_requirements.php.

University at Albany Email: Students are expected to use their UAlbany email when communicating with School of Public Health faculty, staff, and administration and are responsible for checking their email account regularly so as not to miss important, time-sensitive, University, School and Department communications. Personal emails will **not** be used for official correspondence.

Adding a Graduate Certificate: Students may complete a graduate certificate in Global Health Studies, Public Health Surveillance and Preparedness, or Health Disparities while enrolled in the MPH program, and apply up to 9 credits from one certificate toward the MPH degree. To add a certificate, students must pay a \$20 application fee and submit a supplemental degree application under the Graduate Education in their MyUAlbany student portal. Students wishing to complete one of these certificates while enrolled in the MPH should consult with their advisor to ensure that the required courses are included in registration planning, as many of the courses are offered only once per year.

DEPARTMENT & PROGRAM DIRECTORY

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Public Health Leaders of Tomorrow Program

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PLANS OF STUDY

The Academic Plan of Study for each concentration can be accessed and downloaded as a fillable pdf document from www.albany.edu/sph/mph.php. Click on **Academic Forms** in the yellow resource box on the right.

- Biomedical Sciences
- Biostatistics
- Environmental Health Sciences
- Epidemiology
- Health Policy and Management
- Social Behavior and Community Health
- Public Health Practice

INTERNSHIP INFORMATION

The SPH Experiential Learning Handbook and Experiential Learning FAQ are available electronically via the MPH Internships link at <http://www.albany.edu/sph/mph.php>.

ADMINISTRATIVE FORMS

The following administrative forms can be accessed and downloaded as a fillable pdf document from www.albany.edu/sph/mph.php. Click on **Academic Forms** in the yellow resource box on the right.

- Academic Advisement Form
- Academic Progress Plan
- Request for Transfer of Credit to a Master's Degree or Graduate Certificate Program
- Request for Medical Withdrawal
- MPH Request for Course Waiver
- MPH Waiver of Statute of Limitations for Transfer of Credit
- MPH/MS Degree or Concentration Change Request