Current Student FAQs

Accreditation-related Questions

At what stage are we in the accreditation process?

Our application has been submitted and accepted by the CEPH (Council on Education for Public Health). We have submitted the first draft of our self-study for commentary, with the final draft due in mid-September. Our site visit is scheduled for October 17 and 18 in Fall 2011. After the site visit, we will be informed as to the outcome of the review process in Spring 2012.

When are we expected to be accredited?

We have an internal timeline for completing the necessary requirements for accreditation, and thus far we are on schedule. We will keep students updated with the process as it develops.

For those who will have completed all degree requirements before accreditation occurs, can we hold graduation until the program is accredited?

Unless the student is on leave or filing fee (which can be invoked only once during the degree for one quarter only), a student must be enrolled and paid in full each quarter in order to avoid a lapse of student standing. Leaves of absence are only granted under very specific circumstances mandated by the Graduate Division.

If we graduate before the program is accredited, would our degree be ‘grandfathered’?

According to the CEPH Student FAQ page http://ceph.org/pg_constituents_student_faqs.htm, no, your degree would not be considered accredited if you graduate before the degree program is accredited.

What is the difference between having an accredited and non-accredited degree in the working world?

Most of the current public health workforce has not been formally educated or trained in the discipline of public health. If a job description mentions a requirement of an advanced degree in the field, it is unlikely that it will specify that the degree must be accredited. There are a few employers and fellowship providers that we have heard of, such as the U.S. Public Health Corps and the ASPH, that require an accredited degree. For the vast majority of opportunities, however, we believe that the accreditation will not be an issue because of the excellent and well-known reputation of the University of California schools.

What about if we applied for a PhD or other advanced grad degree?

Many PhD programs in Public Health require the student to have a master’s degree first. Again, we believe that the excellent reputation of the UC system schools will make our graduates competitive. We also hope to make as many people as possible aware of our accreditation when it is given, so that admissions committees will know the quality of our program and all its graduates.

Do we as students have any other responsibilities not outlined in the handbook to advance the accreditation process?

The only exams you have to take will be given by the department in relation to degree requirements. The most important thing MPH students (and recent alumni, depending on timing) can do to advance the accreditation process is to attend feedback sessions with the reviewers during the site visit. The reviewers need to get feedback from students in order to complete their review.

Is there a certification exam for Public Health? Should we take it?

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The National Board of Public Health Examiners (NBPHE) created an exam in 2008 for Certification in Public Health. Test takers must have a degree from an accredited program or school of public health, though the NBPHE can make exceptions to this rule at their own discretion. The exam is still relatively new, so it remains to be seen what role it will play in shaping the public health workforce. Their website is http://www.nbphe.org/.

**When should we enroll in Practicum (PH 295)?**

Students who have advanced to candidacy by the end of spring may complete their practicum in the summer or wait until the fall. The advantage to completing practicum in the summer is that your schedule is more flexible because you are not in lecture courses as you would be during the fall. You will have more time to commute to the site if necessary and write up your project when it is finished. However, if your desired practicum site is more active in the fall or you have other summer plans, you may schedule your practicum the fall or winter quarter(s). Students who advance in summer or fall can enroll in practicum in fall or winter quarters.

You must be enrolled in PH 295 in the quarter in which you will begin earning your hours.

**How will we participate in class for PH 295 or communicate with the faculty preceptor if our practicum site is out of the area?**

PH 295 is not a standard lecture course as with most of our courses. The course will be structured around meetings between the student(s) and the faculty preceptor to accommodate the schedules of both parties. If several students are doing the practicum at the same time and schedules permit, they may meet as a group from time to time. Otherwise, the meetings can be conducted on an individual basis between the student and faculty member. If necessary, such meetings can also be done by video conferencing or by phone, etc. We will also create a blog for PH 295 students to share their experiences and have online discussions about any problems they may be experiencing during their practicum.

**What is the process of getting a new program/organization added to our approved practicum catalog? What are the criteria that the program/organization must meet? For desired sites that you probably can't visit to vet, i.e. out-of-state and abroad, what will be your criteria for approval?**

Please refer to the Practicum Procedure and Enrollment Instructions and the Graduate Practicum Information Session video for more information.

**What is expected of us when we do our practicum? ie: Write our own proposal? To what extent do we carry out the proposal? Besides writing a detailed paper of our experiences at the practicum, is there anything else you expect of us?**

Expectations for students during the practicum are written out in the Student Handbook. You are responsible for carrying out your proposed project with the assistance of your site preceptor. You are required to meet with your site preceptor on a regular basis to discuss the progress of the project. Guidelines for writing the proposal and the final written report can be found in the syllabus for PH 295. Your grade in PH 295 and completion of the degree program depends on satisfactory completion of your project as determined by the faculty. Your instructor for PH 295 and faculty mentor are available to you for consultation if you need help as you formulate your project, draft your proposal, and carry out your plans. You will also need to give a presentation on your work to your faculty mentor and make a poster summarizing your work at the conclusion of the experience.

**How detailed does the practicum proposal need to be?**

Your proposal should include citations and references as appropriate. Guidelines are available in the PH 295 syllabus on the Graduate Practicum website.

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Can the faculty who review the proposal reject portions of or the entire proposal even if the site preceptor approves?

Yes. Our faculty members are more familiar with the practicum guidelines and may have different experiences in the field from the site preceptor that lead them to question certain aspects of the proposed project.

How do we determine what counts as earned hours for the practicum?

Earned hours for the practicum must be “contact” hours, in which you are working on your proposed project at the site. Any side projects or work unrelated to your practicum that your site preceptor asks you to do should not be counted in the 240 hours, even if the work is a valuable learning experience. Contact hours start when the site has been approved, your proposal has been approved by faculty, and you arrive at the site to begin work. Contact hours can include an orientation, time spent preparing to write a report for the agency (e.g., literature review, grant writing, etc.), or within reason, time spent learning a skill or software program needed to do your work. Hours spent writing your final paper for the practicum class do not count as contact hours. Your proposal should include a timeline of how you plan to spend your contact hours, and faculty will review and provide feedback for the timeline when you submit your proposal.

What if we do not completely carry out our proposal project within 240 hours? What if we finish our proposal project before 240 hours?

240 hours is the minimum requirement. You can use more time if you need it, but if you have not satisfied the requirements of the project and the PH 295 course requirements by the time grades are due, you must make arrangements in advance with your faculty preceptor to receive a grade of Incomplete (I). The arrangements will outline the work remaining in order to receive a grade and how long you will have to complete the work. The maximum amount of time allowed for making up incomplete work is three quarters of enrollment, but stricter limits may be applied. Please see the university policy on Incompletes here [http://www.senate.uci.edu/senateweb/default2.asp?active_page_id=671](http://www.senate.uci.edu/senateweb/default2.asp?active_page_id=671).

Do we need to submit our projects to the IRB or IACUC for consideration?

You may need to submit your project to the IRB (Institutional Review Board) for consideration if you are working with human subjects or IACUC (Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee) for animal subjects. Your faculty preceptor and site preceptor can help you to determine if your project needs approval. If it is determined that you need IRB or IACUC approval to do your project, an approval letter must be on file in the Public Health Office prior to starting work on the project.

Will we need to present our poster? How do we get a poster made?

All students must submit a poster electronically, but not all posters will be printed. Only students who are available to present their posters at a departmental symposium will have their posters printed. Departmental symposiums are typically only held once or twice a year, so it is understandable that students may not be able to present at those times. Guidelines for making your poster are posted on the Graduate Practicum website. If your poster is to be printed, financial assistance will be provided by the department.

When do we schedule our oral presentation with our faculty mentor?

The presentation must be given prior to the assigning of grades at the end of the quarter in which you are completing your practicum project. Be sure to plan early, as some faculty members leave campus before the quarter has finished.
What kinds of questions will our faculty mentor ask us when we give an oral presentation on our practicum project?

You will be expected to provide an overview of your project and its results. The oral presentation is typically about 10-20 minutes of presentation by the student, with 10 minutes for questions from the faculty. You may wish to prepare a Powerpoint presentation for this presentation, and with advance notice equipment for viewing the Powerpoint, such as a projector and laptop, can be provided by the department. The faculty mentor will critically review your project and may ask questions related to the learning objectives for your emphasis and the PH 295 class as stated in our learning objectives document. The presentation can be conducted over the phone or by tele-conferencing if you are not able to come to campus. You should turn in your final paper for the practicum at least one week before the day of your oral presentation to give faculty time to prepare questions to ask you when you present.

Can we be compensated for our work at the practicum placement? What about gas mileage if our practicum project requires an extensive amount of driving?

You can be compensated by the site as long as there is no conflict of interest, but sites are not expected or required to pay you. The Program in Public Health will consider reimbursements for mileage or other practicum-related costs by petition.

What if my practicum site wants me for a one-time project or does not want to take MPH students as interns every year?

This is possible, and such requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis during the site approval process.

If I take my comprehensive exam in the Fall, can I still start my practicum in the fall quarter?

Yes, you will have an opportunity to start your practicum in the fall quarter if you pass both parts of the comprehensive exam and advance to candidacy, but you should keep the resulting time constraints in mind when designing a project with your site preceptor. You may take an Incomplete (I) grade in the class if you have not finished the project by the end of the quarter. This is actually very common. You also have the option of delaying your practicum until the Winter quarter to allow for more time to complete the project all at once.

Comprehensive Exam Parts 1 and 2 Questions

How many questions will there be in Part 1 of the exam and what is the format?

It is expected that Part 1 will be multiple choice with no more than 200 questions to be completed in four hours. Faculty members will write the questions. The test will be divided into sections, and within each section you will be able to go back to review answers to previous questions if you have time. Part 1 of the exam was designed in this way to help students prepare for the Certified in Public Health exam, given by the National Board of Public Health Examiners, which they may apply to take after graduation.

What will the take-home paper-based portion most likely cover?

Part 2 of the comprehensive examination consists of a synthesis paper on contemporary topics within the student’s area of emphasis. It is expected that the resulting manuscript reflects depth of knowledge on the topic through inclusion of comprehensive critical review of the literature, analysis of data, or policy assessment. The student may be presented with a set of public health scenarios or case studies based on his or her emphasis area. Further information is available in the Comprehensive Examination Guidelines.
Are the case studies supposed to be written in narrative style answering the questions or written with each question numbered and answered as its own set of paragraphs?

Yes, the case studies are supposed to be written in narrative. More so for the “major” case studies than the “minor” case studies, some of which only require quantitative answers with brief explanations.

What if I have trouble coming up with recent citations and references that meet the requirements of Part 2 of the exam?

The requirements for the citations are set to ensure that you are using the most current information available in writing your paper. It is true that the information in most peer-reviewed sources is at least two years old by the time it is published, but it is still likely to be more current than books found in the library. A good way to find recent sources is to start your search on Google Scholar, where you can specify a timeframe for your search. There are times when using a source older than five years is appropriate because of the importance of the work for the topic. In such cases, you may explain this with a justification in your paper. We also recommend consulting with faculty in your emphasis area or the Public Health librarian if you need help with or have questions about references and citations.

How is the comprehensive exam graded? Who will grade it?

The exam will be written and graded primarily by the faculty who taught the classes for the five core competency areas on which the exam is based. There will also be questions about cross-cutting themes in public health education. Most of these are covered through the seminar series. Part 1 of the exam will be multiple-choice and graded through EEE. Part 2 of the exam will be graded by faculty members in the student’s emphasis area.

Do we need to get a passing score (70% or higher) on each competency area or on each part of the exam?

Students must receive a passing score of 70% or higher on each part (i.e. Part 1 and Part 2) of the exam in order to advance to candidacy. The score for Part 1 of the exam will not be broken down by emphasis, core competency area, or cross-cutting themes.

And if we do not pass one or both portions of the comprehensive exam?

You must pass both portions in order to advance to candidacy. You will have an opportunity to make up one or both parts of the exam if necessary.

Can we delay starting Part 2 of the exam?

Normally, it is expected that students will start Part 2 directly after the Part 1 multiple choice exam, but requests for separation of the two parts will be considered on a case-by-case basis. No student will have more than two weeks to complete Part 2 regardless of the start date. Students must ask and receive approval for a delay in the start of Part 2 prior to the exam day for Part 1. You must pass both parts of the exam to be eligible to advance to candidacy.

When is the comprehensive exam offered?

The exam is offered in the Spring quarter and the Fall quarter annually. Please check the Current Students section of the MPH website for testing dates. The normative time for students to take the exam is in the Fall quarter. A make-up exam may be offered in the Winter quarter if it is deemed necessary by the faculty.

How long will it take to get the results of the exam?

Exam results are announced as soon as possible after both parts of the exam have been graded. We will Revised 6-17-2011 SU
endeavor to deliver the results of the Spring exam for Parts 1 and 2 by the Monday after Finals week, but please keep in mind that grades are not officially due until the deadline posted by the Office of the Registrar for each quarter. The timeline for receiving results from the Fall exam is yet to be determined.

Are there any rewards for achieving a high proficiency rating (i.e. Distinguished vs. Excellent) on the exam?

No, though the results of the exam will be noted in the student’s record for use by the faculty in writing letters of recommendation.

Are there study guides for the comprehensive exam?

There are a couple options for study guides for Part 1 of the exam. The Public Health Office has copies of a CPH exam study guide book available for borrowing that may be helpful because of the similarity of material covered by the two exams. This book is also available in an online version with a password found inside the physical book. The Association of Schools of Public Health also has its own online study guide, which is available for purchase from [http://www.asph.org/cphstudyguide/](http://www.asph.org/cphstudyguide/).

Other Questions

For those planning to finish at the end of summer after the first year, do we have the opportunity to walk in the Commencement at the end of Spring?

It is typical for Commencement to include students who graduated or who will graduate in Fall, Winter, or Spring of that academic year. In the 2011 Commencement, MPH students graduating in Summer or the upcoming Fall were allowed to walk, but these arrangements may change from year to year. Please keep in mind that students graduating in Summer or the upcoming Fall quarter may not appear in the Commencement program because of conflicts between the filing deadlines for advancement and the printing of the programs. Master’s students walk in the appropriate School ceremony rather than the Graduate Hooding Ceremony for doctoral students. If you think you may be eligible to walk at Commencement and would like to participate, please alert Stephanie Uiga at the earliest possible opportunity. Your name must be on a list submitted to the Commencement Office by the department in order to reserve extra tickets for guests.

Steps to Summer Graduation:

1) Meet the requirements for advancing to candidacy by passing both parts of the comprehensive exam at the end of Spring. Submit advancement paperwork to the Graduate Division by the deadline for Spring advancement (see Current Students section for filing deadlines).

2) Complete all other courses prior to summer, pass PH 295 and complete your practicum project by the end of summer.

3) File your final degree paperwork by the deadline (see Current Students section for filing deadlines).

Can we please get all the lectures recorded on video in case we miss class?

Class attendance and getting the information or making up work from missed class are your responsibilities as a student. We do not have the time or money to coordinate recording every lecture. There is a service on campus called UCI Replay that will record occasional lectures with advance notification, but arranging for the recording would be your responsibility if the faculty member allowed it. As it happens, the lectures of the PH 291 seminar series are recorded by UCI Extension for their OpenCourseWare project for free because they are of interest to the general public. See ocw.uci.edu.
Curriculum related: To what extent do the professors communicate with each other so that our classes have minimal overlap in content or presentation and therefore could build off each other (i.e. last quarter we had multiple papers simultaneously and this quarter some of us had similar presentations from the librarian multiple times).

Instructors assign coursework based on their expertise in relation to the content of the course. Our MPH curriculum is also informed by the guidelines provided by the Association of Schools of Public Health (ASPH; See: http://www.asph.org/document.cfm?page=851). Development of critical thinking skills are important for public health practice, and as such many courses will require students to research and write about a topic. This may mean having multiple papers due in the same quarter. Faculty members who want to point students in particular directions about library searches will not want to rely on previous courses taken by students. So, some overlap is probably inevitable, but dialogue between students and individual faculty members is encouraged to avoid unnecessary duplication of efforts. Also, please remember that we sometimes open our courses to graduate students from other degree programs in other to enrich the interdisciplinary classroom experience. Therefore, it is important to make sure that all students in a course have the necessary skills to learn the materials.

Public health professional skills - Can the program be more proactive in directly training us with marketable skills such as in the following areas: professional etiquette, leadership, creative thinking, abstract thinking, effective communication, software programs, etc?

The Graduate Public Health seminar is designed to teach many of these skills using guest speakers who have real-world experience. However, we will increasingly coordinate seminars to teach specific skills. The Graduate Student Affairs Officer can assist students in coordinating such seminars at the students’ request. At 60 units, the UCI MPH curriculum is rather full and we cover all the content that ASPH and CEPH expect. We will continue to introduce more elective courses to cover the development of specific skills. For example, we have developed courses on Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and Program Evaluation, and we are looking into developing classes on Leadership, Strategic Management, and Public Health Law.

How can students communicate their concerns to the department?

Questions can be posed and answered on the MPH listserv, where the Chair and the Graduate Student Affairs Officer can see and respond to the questions. Also, this FAQ document will be posted online on the Current Students webpage and updated as necessary. If there is a quorum among the students, a meeting can be called with the Chair at anytime during the academic year. Otherwise, we will plan on having one meeting per quarter. Students can also share their concerns with the elected Graduate Liaison, who will then communicate those concerns to the appropriate faculty or staff.

Additional Funding Sources

The MPH curriculum is a course-intensive program, and we understand the time constraints under which most students pursue the requirements. We encourage students to take time to participate in activities that will enhance their degree and career paths. For example, it is possible for MPH students to serve as Research Assistants on faculty research projects. We may also have a limited number of opportunities for qualified MPH students to serve as Teaching Assistants or Course Readers. Please submit your resume to Stephanie Uiga if you wish to be eligible for TA or Course Reader positions.