Master of Public Health

Comprehensive Examination Guidelines

2010

PROGRAM IN PUBLIC HEALTH
About this Document
This manual is intended for consultation by students enrolled in the MPH program as they consider submitting an application to sit for the required comprehensive examination. The manual describes the policies, procedures, and philosophy underlying the comprehensive examination. In addition to the information presented in this manual, students are strongly encouraged to be familiar with the overarching MPH curriculum policies and requirements. Staff and faculty of the Program are ready to assist students in guiding and monitoring their progress toward completion of all degree requirements. The Program reserves the right to update these guidelines as necessary.

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INTRODUCTION
UC Irvine MPH curriculum emphasizes systematic instruction (didactics) and supervised practical applications of previously studied theory (practicum). Students must demonstrate proficiency in the didactic lectures and seminars before they advance to candidacy for the MPH degree. The comprehensive examination is part of the capstone experience of the MPH program, and it represents an assessment of student preparedness or competency in the core disciplines of public health and comprehension of key challenges in the areas of emphasis currently offered within the MPH degree.

THE COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION
The Comprehensive Examination will be given twice a year. The normative time to take the exam is in the fall quarter, but it is also offered in the spring by special request. Petitions to take the examination at other times will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Exam dates and times will be posted in the “Current Students” section of the MPH website as soon as they are scheduled. Students who have completed all required core courses and the selective courses in their emphasis areas in the MPH curriculum are eligible to sit for the examination. The comprehensive examination may also be taken during concurrent enrollment in no more than two core courses and/or two selective courses. Students are strongly encouraged to plan their course of study in a manner that allows sufficient time to dedicate to the assimilation of course contents and to reflect on the integrative aspects of public health practice before sitting for the comprehensive examination. Passing the comprehensive examination is a pre-requisite for the required capstone public health practicum course.

The comprehensive examination is modeled in part after the National Board of Public Health Examiners (Certified in Public Health; CPH). The examination has two components.

Part – 1: Breath of Knowledge
Part-1 consists of a proctored examination based on the core competencies and the cross-disciplinary themes of public health. The contents examined in Part-1 are covered in core courses in Foundations of Public Health, Graduate Seminar in Public Health, Biostatistics, Environmental Health, Epidemiology, Health Policy and Management, and Social and Behavioral Health. This is a closed book examination that requires an in-depth understanding of the conceptual framework, theories, principles that support discoveries in public health and their translation into practice.
To pass this part of the comprehensive examination, students must demonstrate broad understanding of public health issues and the underlying determinants of health status in populations. The questions require critical thinking drawing upon topics within the core disciplines and cross-cutting themes of communication, informatics, leadership, professionalism, public health biology, cultural sensitivity, and program planning.

Questions in Part-1 of the comprehensive examination are multiple-choice, and must be completed within the allotted period of time. For comparison, the CPH examination contains 200 questions to be completed in four hours. It is expected that the examination will be conducted through the “Electronic Education Environment.”

Part – 2: Synthesis and Depth of Knowledge

Part-2 of the comprehensive examination consists of a synthesis paper on a contemporary topic 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.

Students may be presented with a set of public health scenarios or case studies. Using a problem-based learning approach, the synthesis paper should describe strategies for confronting the scenarios or solving the problems identified in the case study. It should be clear from the assessment that the student has a good understanding of the perspective of a public health professional specializing in the emphasis subject area. Each student will be responsible for developing specific strategies, selecting appropriate methods, with strong justification in the peer reviewed literature. Consultation with faculty members is allowed. Such consultation should be in the form of targeted resource location or questions rather than review drafts of the paper.

The synthesis paper should be no longer than 5,000 words, excluding the list of references. The manuscript should be styled in the format preferred by the American Journal of Public Health (Instruction for Authors). Emphasis should be placed on citations from peer-reviewed sources. Maximum of 25% of total citations from the web Maximum of 25% of total citations from books, and 75% of references must be within the past 5 years. Spelling, grammar, and syntax will be included in the evaluation of the synthesis paper.

Students will have two weeks to complete the synthesis paper. An electronic copy of the paper must be submitted into a designated DropBox under the campus “Electronic Education Environment.” All submissions must be formatted on plain, white background, and must include a properly formatted title page. (See example below). Every page of the exam must display the student Identification Number in the upper right-hand corner. One hard copy of the manuscript must also be submitted by the deadline. Late submissions will not be accepted. Ordinarily, Part-2
of the comprehensive examination will commence right after the completion of Part-I, but later periods will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Students must pass both parts before they can be advanced to candidacy for the MPH degree. Through this examination, the faculty expects students to demonstrate information organization skills, critical thinking, and appropriate breadth of knowledge, consistent with national MPH accreditation standards. The Public Health office will maintain a record of student's examination questions and responses.

GRADING

There are five categories of performance: Exceptional (or Distinguished), Excellent, Good, Fair, and Poor. To demonstrate competency, students must generally score above 70% (good, or meets expectations) in all aspects of the comprehensive examination. Overall grading strategy is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Grading Scale for Performance in the Comprehensive Examination.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proficiency Levels</th>
<th>Proficiency Ratings/Scores</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exceeds Expectations</strong> (highly proficient)</td>
<td>Distinguished 95-100</td>
<td>Clarity of thought is thorough and exemplary. Strong integration of concepts and information. Conclusions strongly presented and well-justified. No factual errors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exceeds Expectations</strong> (very proficient)</td>
<td>Excellent 85-94</td>
<td>Clarity of thought is thorough and excellent. Strong integration of concepts and information. Conclusions logical and well-justified. No or trivial factual errors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Meets Expectations</strong> (proficient)</td>
<td>Good 70-84</td>
<td>Clarity of thought is evident. Integration of concepts and information is adequate. Conclusions evident and logical. Minor factual errors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Below Expectations</strong> (partially proficient)</td>
<td>Fair 31-69</td>
<td>Clarity of thought is evident. Some integration of concepts and information. Conclusions weakly justified. Many factual errors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Below Expectations</strong> (marginally proficient)</td>
<td>Poor 0-30</td>
<td>Little or no clarity of thought is evident. Weak or no integration of concepts and information. Conclusions not evident or weakly justified. Many factual errors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question not addressed</strong> (not proficient)</td>
<td>Fail 0</td>
<td>Student did not address the question asked</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Repetition of the Comprehensive Exam

Students who fail the qualifying examination will have the opportunity for one “make-up” examination no later than one quarter after the first examination. After two unsuccessful attempts to pass the examination, the faculty may recommend additional courses or other forms of remediation prior to a third attempt. Inability to pass the examination after three attempts will result in dismissal from the degree program.
Comprehensive Examination

Submitted to
The Program in Public Health
University of California, Irvine

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Master of Public Health

Submitted by
[Full Name]
[Student Identification Number]
[Date of Submission]