



## A Note on Public Health Program Accreditation

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The United States Department of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation recognize six different regional accreditation organizations. These accreditation organizations accredit several thousand educational institutions, both public and private, ranging from the preschool level to the university level in the U.S. However, a professional degree such as master of public health (MPH) must receive additional accreditation by the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH).

Working as an independent entity, the CEPH is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education to accredit both schools of public health as well as outside public health programs. CEPH helps institutions that want to establish public health programs to evaluate the quality of instruction, research and service, and, if programs meet the CEPH's published criteria, they are granted accreditation.

### Bases for Accreditation Criteria

Accreditation of schools of public health or programs that prepare graduates to work in public health is based on an understanding of the unique functions that these programs perform. Public health programs work to train practitioners, researchers and teachers who are able to competently perform public health functions in state, local and national, as well as international, settings.

Educational excellence is directly related to practical proficiency when it comes to CEPH accreditation. CEPH expects educational quality in several areas, including competencies that public health graduate programs can demonstrate during review for accreditation. CEPH's competency-based criteria connect learning with practice and research. Individuals with a degree from accredited public health graduate programs should be prepared to embark on professional careers with a high degree of

competence in relation to their concentrations. They will also stay up-to-date with new developments in public health and connected areas. Researchers should be ready to engage in work that addresses public health issues relevant to the community. The CEPH will consider a public health program for accreditation provided that the applicant institution can adequately exhibit the following characteristics:

- The program must be housed in an institute of higher education accredited by one of the foresaid accrediting bodies in the US or equivalent accrediting bodies in other countries;
- The program, including faculty, students and staff, must enjoy the same rights, privileges and prestige as other professional preparation programs in the institution;
- Through instruction, research and service, the program will be interdisciplinary, intending to address the health of populations within the communities that such institutions are supposed to be serving. It must provide a special learning environment that supports interdisciplinary communication;
- The program must uphold an organizational culture and structure that supports visions, objectives and standards common to the field of public health. It must dedicate resources to integrate values and goals of public health into all facets of the program's activities;
- A program must also have physical, financial and learning resources for providing areas of knowledge basic to public health. Such program must, at minimal, offer the Master of Public Health (MPH) degree or its equivalent. In addition, the program is expected to

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design, develop and appraise all instructional, research and service undertakings pertinent to the world of public health practice.

Additionally, a program offering an MPH degree must have the following components:

- Mission: A public health program must have a clearly-stated mission with accompanying goals, objectives and values;
- Evaluation: It must have a clear monitoring and evaluation process for overall efforts against the foresaid goals and objectives;
- Institutional environment. Such public health program must be an essential aspect of an accredited institute of higher learning;
- Organization and administration: The program must provide a setting that fosters to learning, research and service. Such organization shall have structures to sustain the work of the program's constituents;
- Governance: The program administration and faculty must have explicitly stated rights and obligations in conjunction with the program. Students too must have participatory roles in such governing body;
- Fiscal Resources: An adequate financial resource must be allocated to operate the public health program;
- The program must have personnel and other pertinent resources to support its operation;

There must be diverse student population (male, female, ethnic minorities) with appropriate cultural competencies apparatus to deal with faculty, students, staff from diverse cultural backgrounds, as well as clear policies for student recruitments and advisements, etc.;

The program will offer either a general MPH degree and or an MPH with areas of specialization, and is required to be at a minimum 42 semester-credit units in length;

Students must complete coursework such as biostatistics, epidemiology, environment/occupational health, social and behavioral sciences, and health services administration in order to realize both depth and breadth in the five core areas of public health.

Furthermore, all MPH seeking graduate students should develop basic skills in public health concepts and demonstrate the application of these concepts through a practice-based experience called field internship, which is relevant to students' areas of specialization. In such professional degree program, there shall also be a series of competencies that would be taught by qualified and credentialed faculty. Therefore, all graduates from such program must work on a project that would lead to demonstrating a culminating experience.

Finally, like any good system, such program shall have an assessment procedures plan in place that would assess and document the degree of skill the student has attained in the following competencies:

- Communication and Informatics
- Critical thinking

- Diversity and Culture
- Leadership
- Professionalism
- Program Planning
- Systems Thinking
- Public Health Biology

The core competencies are not a strict or unyielding design for curriculum development or even the requirements of particular courses. Rather, they provide the basic skills for the myriad components of public health: the abilities, knowledge, and characteristics necessary for professionals, and the areas that their public health instruction will be applied. Faculty should view the core competencies as a guide and students should utilize them to judge their mastery of public health.

\*Adopted from Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH.org)