

Frequently Asked Questions

MPH Task Force Final Report

Core Curriculum

1. Why is UMass changing the MPH core curriculum?

The world of public health is constantly evolving and as our understanding of complex problems grows, so does the need for integrative and collaborative approaches to public health issues. To meet these changing norms, in 2016, the Council for Education for Public Health (CEPH) revised their required competencies for maintaining accreditation and increased the documentation required to demonstrate that these competencies are being met. SPHHS has had trouble meeting these new requirements, many of which reflect a curriculum that is more integrated across program areas than we currently offer. The proposed curriculum aims to adapt our courses to meet these competencies and provide our students with the innovative and high-quality training they need to be successful as public health professionals.

2. What does the proposed core curriculum look like?

The new core curriculum would include four 3-credit courses that all MPH students are required to take:

- No Justice, No Health: Foundations of Public Health Practice (SPHHS 605)
- Promoting Change: Leadership and Management in Public Health (SPHHS 606)
- Identifying and Describing Public Health Problems (SPHHS 615)
- Evidence for Action: Addressing Public Health Problems (SPHHS 616)

These courses will cover all of the material that is currently offered through the current core courses using a more integrative approach centered around health equity and social justice. For example, SPHHS 615 and SPHHS 616 will incorporate material currently covered in EPI 630 and BIOST 540.

Table 2. Proposed MPH core courses, CEPH learning objectives and foundational competencies, and typical semester(s) taught

Core Course	Learning Objectives	Foundational Competencies	On-campus	Online
SPHHS 605 (3 credits) No Justice, No Health: Foundations of Public Health Practice	1,2,6,7,8,9, 10,11,12	5,6,12,15	Fall	Fall
SPHHS 606 (3 credits) Promoting Change: Leadership and Management in Public Health		10,13,14,15,16, 17,21	Spring	Spring
SPHHS 615 (3 credits) Identifying and Describing Public Health Problems	3,4,6	1,2,3,4,7,18	Fall	Fall
SPHHS 616 (3 credits) Evidence for Action: Addressing Public Health Problems	5,6,9	3,8,9,11,18, 19,20	Spring	Spring

3. When will the new integrated core curriculum begin?

The integrated core curriculum will be implemented in Fall 2023. All students who matriculate before Fall 2023 will continue to take the current core courses (BIOST 540, EHS 565, EPI 630, HPP 601, and HPP 620 or HPP 624 in the online program).

4. Will the new core courses completely replace the existing core courses or will they all still be offered?

We anticipate that the existing core courses will still be offered, but they would no longer be required for all MPH students. These courses might remain in the curriculum of the individual programs (e.g., the EHS MPH might continue to require EHS 565, but students in CHE, HPM, BIOST and EPI would no longer be required to take this class). Individual programs may decide to offer these courses less frequently (e.g. once per year on campus) and/or to change the content to provide a more rigorous, discipline-specific introductory-level course.

5. What are the anticipated class sizes for the new core courses?

Based on our current on campus enrollment, we anticipate that the new core courses will have enrollments of 50-60 students. As our programs grow, we will monitor enrollments and consider adding additional sections in order to maintain the characteristics of our graduate programs, which include smaller course sizes.

6. Will students still get the same level of training in biostatistics and epidemiology that they currently receive?

Yes, SPHHS 615 and SPHHS 616 will cover the material currently taught in BIOST 540 and EPI 630. In the new core courses, students will be taught this material in an integrated manner, likely using a case studies based approach. This training is meant to be more applied, as it will be introduced in the context of larger public health issues, rather than in isolation.

MPH Practicum and Culminating Project

7. How will the practicum course work?

The MPH Practicum experience will be taught as a single, 3-credit course that all MPH students must take. While a UMass instructor will be responsible for ensuring that students meet the course requirements (producing at least two work products, a written report, and an oral presentation of their work), students are responsible for finding their own site to complete the fieldwork. If students need additional support finding a site, university staff members, including the Director of the Office of Public Health Practice and Outreach and/or staff in the Career Planning Office, will be available to provide resources. Most full-time students are expected to

register for the Practicum course during the fall of their second year, but they may begin their fieldwork in the preceding summer.

The Practicum course will be offered on-campus every Fall semester. In the online program, the Practicum course will continue to be offered every semester; on-campus students may enroll in the online version of the course if they prefer, although they should be aware of the potential for additional financial costs.

8. What will the new Culminating Project course look like?

We are proposing a fundamentally different approach to the MPH project than is currently used by the on-campus programs. Students across all SPHHS disciplines will be enrolled in a single course that will meet throughout the semester to provide students with support and guidance as they work on completing their MPH project. The goal of the project is to synthesize and integrate knowledge acquired in course work and learning experiences and to apply theory and principles in a situation that approximated some aspect of professional practice. Because of this, the Practicum course is a prerequisite for the Culminating Project course and may not be taken concurrently. As a final culminating experience, the Culminating Project provides an opportunity to study a practical and current public health problem selected by the student, who will apply critical thinking, analytical abilities, and communication skills into a final report that integrates across core academic areas of public health.

The Culminating Project Report is a research project that focuses on a specific public health topic area and is of sufficient depth and detail to inform the practice community, based on a current public health problem or issue. It is the final requirement for completion of the MPH degree and it provides evidence of the student's ability to synthesize and integrate knowledge acquired during their degree program and practice experience. Ideally, the written report is developed and delivered in a manner that is useful to external stakeholders, such as non-profit or governmental organizations.

Students may work together in groups of up to three students, but each student must also include individual components. We propose that the Culminating Project Course include:

- A topic proposal, including two foundational competencies and two concentration-specific competencies to be addressed in the Culminating Project Report
- A complete literature review of the project topic
- A first draft of the Culminating Project Report
- A final draft of the Culminating Project Report formatted following the UMass Thesis and Dissertation guidelines
- A final oral presentation for on-campus students or digital presentation for online students

9. How will students receive adequate support for their MPH project if it is a single course and not a collaboration between a student and their advisor?

Students may still consult with their academic advisor (or other faculty within their disciplinary program) for content-specific questions as they work on completing their MPH project; however, the academic advisor will not be expected to play any role in certifying completion of the project or in grading the students' work. We anticipate that the advisor will truly play only an advisory role.

Impact on Individual Disciplines and Other SPHHS Programs

10. Will the new core courses be limited only to MPH students?

No, these courses will be open to all graduate students, although priority will be given to MPH students.

11. How will the new curriculum impact MS and PhD programs and their curriculum?

Programs that require the current core courses for their MS/PhD programs should evaluate whether the new core courses will provide students with sufficient content, or if the current courses are needed (recognizing that the content of the current courses may change). Also, programs will need to revisit prerequisites for their courses (e.g. allowing students to take SPHHS 615 & 616 instead of BOST 540/EPI 630). Programs should review all degree-tracking forms to check for other issues that may arise, which were not anticipated by the MPH Task Force. A list of questions that Programs should consider is included in Section IX of the final report.

12. Will there be enough students in small programs to offer the discipline courses and meet the discipline-specific competencies?

This question must be answered by individual programs, as it is beyond the scope of the Task Force's charge. However, the Task Force does not anticipate that this will be a problem above and beyond the challenges that small programs currently face.

Sequencing and Timing

13. Will the sequencing of courses give non-traditional students (4+1 students, part-time students) enough flexibility to complete the program?

Yes, similar to the existing core courses, the recommended core courses do not have prerequisites, with the exception of SPHHS 616, which requires SPHHS 615. Here are some different ways that students could complete the program:

Table 3. Example programs of study for full-time traditional and accelerated (4+1) MPH students with revised curriculum

<i>Traditional students (on-campus and online)</i>			
Fall Year 1	Spring Year 1	Fall Year 2	Spring Year 2
SPHHS 605 (3 c)	SPHHS 606 (3 c)	SPHHS 698: Practicum (3 c)	SPHHS 691: Culminating Project (3 c)
SPHHS 615 (3 c)	SPHHS 616 (3 c)	Discipline required or elective course (3 c)	Discipline required or elective course (3 c)
Discipline required or elective course (3 c)	Discipline required or elective course (3 c)	Discipline required or elective course (3 c)	
Discipline required or elective course (3 c)	Discipline required or elective course (3 c)	Discipline required or elective course (3 c)	

<i>Accelerated (4+1) students</i>			
Senior Year Fall	Senior Year Spring	+1 Year Fall	+1 Year Spring
SPHHS 605 (3 c)	SPHHS 606 (3 c)	SPHHS 698: Practicum (3 c)	SPHHS 691: Culminating Project (3 c)
SPHHS 615 (3 c)	SPHHS 616 (3 c)	Discipline required or elective course (3 c)	Discipline required or elective course (3 c)

Table 3 (continued).

Senior Year Fall	Senior Year Spring	+1 Year Fall	+1 Year Spring
UG coursework (3 c)	UG coursework (3 c)	Discipline required or elective course (3 c)	Discipline required or elective course (3 c)
UG coursework (3 c)	UG coursework (3 c)	Discipline required or elective course (3 c)	Discipline required or elective course (3 c)
UG coursework (3 c)	UG coursework (3 c)	Discipline required or elective course (3 c)	Discipline required or elective course (3 c)

Table 4. Example program of study for part-time students in the PHP, MPH-N, and MPH-W programs

<i>Part-time Students (usually online)</i>							
Semester 1	Semester 2	Semester 3	Semester 4	Semester 5	Semester 6	Semester 7	Semester 8
SPHHS 605 (3 c)	SPHHS 615 (3 c)	SPHHS 616 (3 c)	SPHHS 606 (3 c)	Required or elective course (3 c)	SPHHS 698: Practicum (3 c)	Required or elective course (3 c)	SPHHS 691: Culminating Project (3 c)
		Required or elective course (3 c)	Required or elective course (3 c)	Required or elective course (3 c)	Required or elective course (3 c)	Required or elective course (3 c)	Required or elective course (3 c)

MPH Teaching Faculty

14. Who will teach the new core courses?

The MPH Teaching Faculty Group will be charged with developing the new curriculum. Faculty members who are interested in being a part of the initial group should inform their department chair. The Associate Dean for Graduate and Professional Studies will be asking for nominations in Spring 2021.

The MPH Teaching Faculty Group will be responsible for determining who will be teaching the on-campus courses. There may also be opportunities to teach in the online program and/or for collaboration with online instructors as we develop our implementation plans.

15. Why isn't Biostatistics specifically mentioned in the final report? Can Biostatistics faculty be part of the MPH Teaching Faculty Group?

While we fully recognize the importance of Biostatistics in Public Health and for students to have a solid foundation in Biostatistics, the current CEPH foundational competencies and learning objectives do not focus heavily on Biostatistics. As shown in Appendix C, BOST 540 currently covers only one learning objective (#3) and two foundational competencies (#2, #3). Our examples of which faculty might teach the new core courses inadvertently excluded Biostatistics; this was an oversight on the part of the Task Force and was not intended to suggest that Biostatistics faculty and/or principles would not be included in the new core courses.