

GUIDELINES FOR THE MPH/MSPH COMPREHENSIVE EXAMS

Introduction

The goals of the Comprehensive Examination are to demonstrate not only a student's mastery of his/her chosen subject area, but also the ability to integrate material acquired in their program of study and to apply this understanding to issues that may confront public health professionals. As such, the exams should reflect the students ability to integrate across their coursework rather than just be a retesting of individual courses. The Comprehensive Examinations administered to students in the MPH/MSPH degree programs are designed to reflect not only each program's objectives but the overall concentration objectives as well. The Field Experience, Special Project/Thesis are not interchangeable with the comprehensive examination.

There are two comprehensive exams that may be taken separately or concurrently.

1. **Core Exam:** For MPH students this tests mastery related to all of the five core areas –biostatistics, epidemiology, health policy and management, environmental and occupational Health and social and behavioral sciences as applied to health. For MSPH students this tests mastery related to epidemiology, biostatistics and one other selected core area. This section is developed by a college committee comprised of faculty who consistently teach the core courses and is administered to all students taking the exam regardless of their home department. This exam consists of multiple choice questions.
2. **Concentration Exam:** This tests mastery related to the students' department and concentration requirements. The MPH concentration examination will be developed separately for each concentration area. The MSPH concentration exam will be developed with the assistance of the thesis committee. Students may learn the exam format (essay, short answer, multiple choice, oral) from their advisor and should expect to spend three to four hours taking the written exam (oral exam will take between one and three hours). The department chairperson will assign a tenured faculty member to act as a comprehensive exam resource person. This faculty member will work with the coordinator from each concentration area in developing the exam for students from that concentration. Questions may be solicited from faculty who teach courses in the concentration. Faculty who develop objective questions will provide a key, essay questions will be returned to the question author for grading. Upon completion of grading, the grade and the exam are returned to the Office of Academics who will notify the student and the advisor.

All exams are graded on a pass/fail basis. Both exams are equally weighted. Thus, a satisfactory performance in each exam is required. Failure to obtain a score of 70% or more on either exam will require the student to retake the failed parts. One retake of each exam is permitted. The core exam retake is only permitted the next semester and the concentration exam may be retaken at a time determined by the advisor.

Requirements for the Comprehensive Examination

A. *Eligibility and Registration for the Core Exam*

1. To be eligible to sit for the exam a student must have
 - a. Completed all required core courses or enrolled in the last core course.
 - b. Attained at least a 3.0 GPA and be in good academic standing.
 - c. No course work (excluding field experience, special project, and thesis) with a grade of incomplete.
 - d. Written approval of advisor and Associate Dean for Academic Affairs.
 - e. Registered for at least two credits in the semester the exam is taken (not required to be registered in order to retake the exam the following semester).

B. *Eligibility and Registration for the Concentration Exam*

1. To be eligible to sit for the exam a student must have
 - a. Completed a minimum of 27 credits (including core courses but not including field experience or special project/thesis) prior to the semester in which the exam is taken. Students in dual degree programs may take the exam with 24 public health credits completed.
 - b. Attained at least a 3.0 GPA and be in good academic standing.
 - c. No course work (excluding field experience, special project, and thesis) with a grade of incomplete.
 - d. Written approval of advisor, and Assistant Dean for Academics.
 - e. Registered for at least two credits in the semester the exam is taken (not required to be registered in order to retake exam the following semester).

2. Registration Procedures

Exams are regularly scheduled on campus each semester on Friday. If oral or take home exams are used, the academic advisor should provide details as to how these are implemented.

- a. Students needing special arrangements due to disability should confer with the academic advisor and the Assistant Dean for Academics. Students requesting alternate dates for the concentration exam must have approval from their Department Chairperson and Advisor, and the Department will take full responsibility for conducting the exam.
- b. All students seeking to sit for the comprehensive exam must submit an *Application for Comprehensive Examination* form **six weeks** prior to the exam date. This includes retakes, if the advisor requires the retake to be during the regularly scheduled exam time. The Office of Academics shall:
 - i. Review the student' s transcript and certify the student to take the exam.
 - ii. Notify each student, department chair and advisor of the student' s eligibility to take the exam.
 - iii. Arrange for space, proctor, collection and distribution of exams departments for grading (for regularly scheduled exams).
 - iv. Take responsibility for grading the core exam.
 - v. Send letters to students informing them of their grade within 11 working days of the exam (a copy will be kept on record).

The department curriculum committee will regularly monitor the quality of the concentration exam and that exams reflect the program objectives. The Educational Outcomes Committee is responsible for monitoring the quality of the core exam. The department will assure that a faculty member who is familiar with the department' s exams is available the day of the exam for consultation and questions regarding the core exam and the concentration exam.