

**MPH Program
Faculty Advisor Guide
2008-2009**

Introduction

For the MPH Program, student advising involves guiding students in mapping out coursework and, during the second year of study, working more closely with students as they develop the MPH Research Project, a capstone/culminating experience in the degree program that integrates knowledge and skills learned through didactic and practical study. This brief guide is intended to provide faculty advisors with the resources needed to have an effective and rewarding experience with their advisees. A quick reference guide appears on page 8, and track planners are in the appendix.

Overview of the MPH Program

Mission. The mission of VCU's MPH Program is to promote health and well-being through commitment to public health education, excellence in research, and dedication to community service.

Purpose. The program is designed to prepare graduates for careers as public health practitioners. Graduates find employment in federal, state, and local public health agencies (e.g., Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Virginia Department of Health, Chesterfield Health District); non-profit organizations (give example), private industry (e.g., Health Management Corporation), health systems, and academia. A small proportion of graduates pursue a clinical professional degree or further graduate study.

Accreditation. The MPH Program is currently accredited by the Council on Education for Public Health, through 2014 (www.ceph.org). The program was first accredited in 1996 and was the first accredited program in Virginia.

Current offerings. Currently, the MPH Program is in the developing School of Public Health at VCU. Concentrations, or "tracks," are available through two departments in the developing school—the Department of Epidemiology and Community Health (DECH) and the Social and Behavioral Health Department (SBHD). As the School of Public Health develops over the coming years, new tracks in Biostatistics, Environmental Health, and Public Health Policy will be offered. The generalist track is anticipated to be phased out as a greater variety of tracks are implemented.

MPH Program Tracks, 2008-2009

Track	Purpose	Department home	Credit breakdown
Epidemiology	Designed to train students who want to specialize in research methods and analysis and interpretation of public health data.	DECH	24 "core" 12 "track- specific" 9 elective
Generalist	Gives students a broad overview of public health issues and training in epidemiologic and biostatistical methods commonly used by public health professionals. May also be used by students to design a curriculum in a focused area of interest for which there is no track currently available.	DECH	24 "core" 9 "track-specific" 12 elective
Social and Behavioral Science	Designed for students who want to understand behavioral and social factors associated with mortality and morbidity and to participate in the design, implementation, and evaluation of interventions, programs, and policies that address these factors.	SBHD	24 "core" 12 "track- specific" 9 elective

Program at a Glance

Credits:	45
Typical time to complete (FT)	4-5 semesters (2 calendar years)
Culminating experience (core requirement):	MPH Research Project
Practical Experience (core requirement):	Public Health Internship
Frequency of didactic course offerings:	Typically once per year
On-line offerings:	Extremely limited at present

Students should be directed to focus on completing the bulk of core (foundational) coursework during the first fall and spring semesters, then pursue elective courses as a secondary goal. Courses that provide a good foundation are BIOS 543, EPID 571, and EPID 600, and these should be taken in the first fall semester, if possible. Of the 45 required credits for the MPH degree, 6 involve integrated and practical learning (the MPH Research Project and the Public Health Internship). Students may register for the Public Health Internship after they have completed a minimum of 18 credit hours, including the core course in epidemiology (EPID 571). The Research Project is typically completed during the last semester of study in the program. On-line offerings are limited to one core course and one to two elective courses at present, with plans to expand in this area significantly in the near future.

Table 1. Required Courses by Track, 2008-2008 (all courses are 3 credits each)

Course	Title	Gen	Epi	SBS	Semester Offered
BIOS 543*	Statistical Methods I	•	•	•	Fall
EPID 571	Epidemiology I: Principles of Epidemiology	•	•	•	Fall
EPID 600**	Introduction to Public Health	•	•	•	Fall /Summer
EPID 602	Public Health Organization and Management	•	•	•	Fall
EPID 604	Principles of Occupational & Environmental Health	•	•	•	Fall
EPID 605	Epidemiology of Health Behaviors	•	•	•	Spring
EPID 694	MPH Program Research Project	•	•		Every
EPID 693	Public Health Internship	•	•		Every
SBHD 608	Health Communication	•		•	Spring
SBHD 694	MPH Program Research Project			•	Fall/Spring
SBHD 693	Public Health Internship			•	Fall/Spring
SBHD 609	Res. Methods in Social & Behavioral Health			•	Fall
SBHD 610	Behavioral Measurement			•	Spring
EPID 606	Epidemiology II: Epidemiologic Methods	•	•	•	Spring
EPID 603	Public Health Policy and Politics	•	•		Spring
BIOS 544	Statistical Methods II		•		Spring
EPID 620	Cancer Epidemiology		•		Spring

Note: Yellow-shaded courses are core didactic courses. Grey-shaded courses are core practical/integrative courses.
 *Soon to be offered on-line. **Available on-line in summer semester.

Course Sequencing

Since most courses in the MPH curriculum are offered only once per year, sequencing is critical in mapping out course registration. **Full-time students** have traditionally been encouraged to focus on completing core courses in their first year. Recommended (ideal) course sequencing for a full-time student intending to complete the degree in two academic years is described in Table 3 on page 5. Students may skip the summer semester, if desired, and still complete course requirements in the traditional fall-spring semesters.

Part-time students are encouraged to focus on core courses, with the following sequence recommended in the first two years:

Table 2. Suggested Sequence for Part-Time Students

Number of credits for which registered	Semester				
	Fall 1	Spring 1	Summer 1	Fall 2	Spring 2
3	EPID 571	EPID 605	EPID 600	BIOS 543	EPID 606
6	EPID 571	EPID 605	EPID 600	EPID 602	Track reqmt.
	BIOS 543	EPID 606	Elective	EPID 604	Track reqmt.

Elective Course Selection

General information. Students are encouraged to take elective courses in their areas of interest, and the MPH Program lists appropriate elective courses on its web pages and track planners.

Electives outside the MPH curriculum. Students wishing to take an elective course outside of the MPH Program curriculum and not specifically recommended on the MPH Program website or related promotional materials *must* obtain approval from a faculty advisor or the Director of Educational Programs. Courses must be graduate level and focus on a topic germane to public health.

Advisor questions about electives. Advisors with questions about the suitability of an elective course should contact the Director of Educational Programs.

Practical/Integrative Courses

Public Health Internship. The Public Health Internship is a supervised experience designed to expose MPH graduate students to a real-world public health practice setting, requiring them to integrate classroom knowledge and skills in practical applications in a professional environment. Students must work a minimum of 180 hours to earn the required three academic credits. Students must have completed a minimum of 18 credit hours in the MPH program curriculum, including EPID 571, Epidemiology I: Principles. The Site Supervisor, a representative from the practice setting, assigns tasks, instructs the student in new skills, and evaluates the student's progress. The Site Supervisor communicates with the Public Health Internship Director, an MPH Program faculty member who directs the internship course. Internships are conducted at organizations such as the Virginia Department of Health, American Cancer Society, Virginia League for Planned Parenthood, Christian Children's Fund, and Virginia Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation, and Substance Abuse Services.

MPH Research Project. This project is an independent research project that serves as a culminating experience to demonstrate application of the knowledge acquired in the MPH Program. The major product of this culminating experience is a scholarly written report on a topic of public health significance. For example, if the student is interested in studies of urban health problems, the project could be designed as observational, analytic, or evaluative. Observational or analytic studies may be

conducted on such topics as urban violence, low birth weight, school attendance, childhood lead poisoning, teen pregnancy, incomplete immunization of children, or HIV transmission and AIDS. The evaluative study may consider the efficacy and effectiveness of ongoing preventive interventions, or the evaluation of various existing programs.

All research projects must be human-based and involve data analysis. The data may consist of existing data sets or data collected by the student specifically for the research project. The completed project will be presented in a poster session on MPH Research Day to demonstrate understanding of the topic and ability to explain the study design and interpretation of results.

Transfer of Credit

The MPH Program permits only 6 credit hours of applicable coursework, taken prior to matriculation in the MPH Program, to be transferred. Students/prospective students should be advised that any coursework beyond 6 credits, taken as a non-degree-seeking VCU student or non-VCU student, may not be transferred. Students who request a transfer of more than 6 credits of applicable coursework into the MPH Program may have to re-take coursework in the VCU MPH curriculum.

Advising Guidelines and General Information

Advisor assignment. Advisors will be assigned to students prior to their matriculation into the MPH Program, based on information students provide on their background and areas of interest. Students and advisors will receive notice of these assignments via email or postal mail.

Advisor/student meetings. Students and advisors should arrange to meet once per semester, to discuss course registration, career interests, and topical areas of interest in public health. Advisors should document meetings using the advisor form found at <http://www.epidemiology.vcu.edu/Faculty/advisorForms.html>

Guidance toward MPH degree culminating experience. By the end of the second semester in the first year of study (for full-time students), advisors should have asked students to narrow their interests in public health to a topic in which they would like to focus their culminating experience, the MPH Research Project. Advisors should encourage students to do class projects in this area of interest, when possible and applicable, to help students build a knowledge base in this area in preparation for the MPH Research Project. Student guide on the research project is available at: http://www.epidemiology.vcu.edu/MPH_Program/researchguide/guidelines_05-24_07.html

Periodic assessment of student progress. The Director of Educational Programs and available MPH Program faculty will meet at the end of each semester and assess student progress, identifying, through faculty input, students who may need assistance or special guidance, based on transcript grades and anecdotal information on performance in the classroom. In October, January and June, students will receive letters from the Director of Educational Programs acknowledging their progress and most recent semester's course registration. The letter will provide guidance on planning for any future semesters. Letters will address any issues needing attention such as incomplete coursework, courses taken out of logical sequence, inappropriate course registration (e.g., registering for an undergraduate course) and provide information on steps a student must take to resolve any areas that need correction. Faculty advisors will be provided with a copy of these advising letters.

Quick Reference Guide

For convenience, a Quick Reference Guide is included on page 7 of this document.

Table 3. Suggested Sequence of Courses for Full-Time Students					
Course	Title	Gen	Epi	SBS	Notes
Fall semester, year 1					
BIOS 543	Statistical Methods I	•	•	•	Should be taken in Fall 1. Soon to be offered on line.
EPID 571	Epidemiology I: Principles of Epidemiology	•	•	•	Must be taken in Fall 1.
EPID 600	Introduction to Public Health	•	•	•	Should be taken in Fall 1. Also available on line , summer can be taken before matriculating in program.
EPID 602	Public Health Organization and Management	•	•	•	Could be taken Fall 1 or Fall 2.
EPID 604	Principles of Occupational & Environmental Health	•	•		Could be taken Fall 1 or Fall 2 for Gen or Epi track.
SBHD 609	Res. Methods in Social & Behavioral Health			•	
Elective(s)	From approved list or advisor approval	•	•	•	0-2, depending on course load, selection of EPID 602 and/or 604 for fall year 1 or fall year 2
Spring semester, year 1					
BIOS 544	Statistical Methods II		•		
EPID 603	Public Health Policy and Politics	•	•		
EPID 605	Epidemiology of Health Behaviors	•	•	•	May be listed as SBHD 605 in near future
EPID 606	Epidemiology II: Epidemiologic Methods	•	•	•	
SBHD 610	Behavioral Measurement			•	
Elective(s)	From approved list or advisor approval				According to course load/interest
Summer semester, year 1					
EPID 693	Public Health Internship	•	•		May be taken in summer or a succeeding semester.
SBHD 693	Public Health Internship			•	May be taken in summer or a succeeding semester.
Elective(s)	From approved list or advisor approval				According to course load/interest

Table 3. Suggested Sequence of Courses for Full-Time Students					
Course	Title	Gen	Epi	SBS	Notes
Fall semester, year 2					
EPID 602	Public Health Organization and Management			•	If not taken in Fall 1 for Gen, Epi, or SBS track, must be taken in Fall 2.
EPID 604	Principles of Occupational & Environmental Health			•	If not taken in Fall 1 for Gen or Epi track, must be taken in Fall 2.
EPID 625	Epidemiology III—Advanced Methods & Data Analysis				Excellent elective for Epidemiology track students
Elective(s)	From approved list or advisor approval				According to course load/interest
Spring semester, year 2					
SBHD 608	Health Communication	•		•	Spring
EPID 620	Cancer Epidemiology		•		Spring
EPID 694	MPH Program Research Project	•	•		Every
SBHD 694	MPH Program Research Project			•	
Elective(s)	From approved list or advisor approval				According to course load/interest

Quick Reference Guide for Advisors of MPH Students

Frequency of meetings with advisees:

General: Two times per year, in fall (October) and spring (March), to plan for course selection and address any issues student wishes to raise (e.g., career planning).

During MPH Research Project: At least once during semester prior to the one in which student intends to do project. Frequently (twice monthly to weekly) during semester in which student is conducting the research project to assess work and ensure progress according to timeline.

Documentation of meetings with advisees:

Please document your meetings on the MPH Advisor form, available on line at <http://www.epidemiology.vcu.edu/Faculty/advisorForms.html> (please bookmark).

Course selection guidelines:

Focus on completing core courses to the extent possible during the first year. Core courses provide a key foundation for electives and certain required coursework for specific tracks.

MPH Research Project Guidelines:

Through meetings with your advisees, try to guide student interest to a particular area in which the student will conduct the culminating experience. By the end of year 1 in the program, students should have decided on their area of interest so that they can begin year 2 with a focus on that topic.

Public Health Internship:

Students must have completed a minimum of 18 credits in the MPH Program, including EPID 571, Principles of Epidemiology, to register for the Public Health Internship. Most full-time students will be eligible to register for the internship in the first summer semester in the program.

Electives:

Track planners (see appendix) list elective courses for each track. Examples of possible non-departmental electives are listed on the Department of Epidemiology & Community Health website.

Non-departmental electives: http://www.epidemiology.vcu.edu/MPH_Program/electives.htm

Regular input on advisees:

Twice a year, in January and May, the Director of Educational Programs will request input from faculty on the performance of their advisees (and students in their classes). Input gained at these meetings will be used to generate a letter to each student assessing their progress in the program and providing guidance on issues such as course selection for any coming semesters.

QUESTIONS:

Contact Lisa Anderson, Director of Educational Programs, lsanders@vcu.edu, 6-2512.

APPENDIX

MPH Program Track Planners

MPH Program Track Planners

The attached pages may be used to track student progress in the MPH tracks in which they are enrolled. Advisors may work with students to map out a tentative course schedule, revising each semester as needed. Updated copies of the track planner should be provided to the MPH Program Coordinator for filing with the student's official records.

**MPH Curriculum Planner – Epidemiology Track
45 Credits Minimum**

Student's Name: _____ Year of Entry: _____
 Advisor: _____ Student's ID#: _____

Courses by Semester	Cr	Academic Year Taken (# Credits)				
		F08	S09	Su09	F09	S10
FALL Required:						
<i>To be taken Year 1:</i>						
EPID 571 - Epidemiology I Principle of Epi	3					
EPID 600 - Intro to Public Health	3					
BIOS 543 - Statistical Methods I	3					
Can be taken Year 1 or Year 2:						
EPID 602 - Public Health Org and Mngmnt	3					
EPID 604 - Occupat. and Environ. Health	3					
FALL Electives:						
EPID 622 Maternal & Child Health (take in second fall semester)	3					
EPID 625 Epidemiology III (2 nd fall sem)						
<i>Fall Semester Credits Completed</i>						
SPRING Required:						
EPID 603 - Health Policy and Politics	3					
EPID 605 - Health Behaviors	3					
EPID 606 - Epidemiology II: Epi Methods	3					
EPID 620 - Cancer Epidemiology	3					
BIOS 544 - Statistical Methods II	3					
SPRING Electives:						
Pharm 691 - Pharmacoepidemiology	3					
<i>Spring Semester Credits Completed</i>						
SUMMER Electives:						
EPID 621 - Infectious Disease Epidemiology						
<i>Summer Semester Credits Completed</i>						
ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS - indicate semester to be taken						
EPID 693 - Public Health Internship	3					
EPID 694 - MPH Research Project*	3					
Total Credits Completed – All Semesters						
						Σ All Credits

*MPH Research Project - students who collect their own data may elect to receive 3 additional credits over two semesters.

NOTE: The MPH Program reserves the right to change course offerings.

Epidemiology Track Suggested Electives*

Fall Electives	Credits
EPID 560 - Fundamentals Of Data Management & Analysis	3
MICR 510 - Scientific Integrity	1
Spring Electives	
SBHD 608 - Health Communication	3
SBHD 609 - Research Methods in Social & Behavioral Health	3
SBHD 610 - Behavioral Measurement	3
PHARM 691 - Pharmacoepidemiology	3
BIOS 571 - Clinical Trials	3
Summer Electives	
EPID 621 - Infectious Disease Epidemiology	3
Fall Electives - 2nd fall only	
EPID 622 - MCH Epidemiology	3
BIOS 524 - Biostatistical Computing	3
BIOS 572 - Statistical Analysis of Biomedical Data	3

*Other courses might be taken as electives with approval of advisor.

Semester - Year	Advisor's Signature	Date Approved
Fall 2008		
Spring 2009		
Summer 2009		
Fall 2009		
Spring 2010		
Summer 2010		
Fall 2010		
Spring 2011		
Summer 2011		

**MPH Curriculum Planner – Generalist Track
45 Credits Minimum**

Student's Name: _____ Year of Entry: _____
 Advisor: _____ Student ID#: _____

Courses by Semester	Cr	Academic Year Taken (# Credits)				
		F08	S09	Su09	F09	S10
FALL Required:						
<i>To be taken Year 1:</i>						
EPID 571 - Epidemiology I: Principles of Epi	3					
EPID 600 - Intro to Public Health	3					
BIOS 543 - Statistical Methods I	3					
<i>Can be taken Year 1 or Year 2:</i>						
EPID 602 - Public Health Org and Management	3					
EPID 604 - Occupat. and Environ. Health	3					
FALL Electives:						
<i>Fall Semester Credits Completed</i>						
SPRING Required:						
EPID 603 - Health Policy and Politics	3					
EPID 605 - Epi of Health Behaviors	3					
EPID 606 - Epidemiology II: Epi Methods	3					
SBHD 608 - Health Communication	3					
SPRING Electives:						
<i>Spring Semester Credits Completed</i>						
SUMMER Electives:						
<i>Summer Semester Credits Completed</i>						
ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS - indicate semester to be taken						
EPID 693 - Public Health Internship	3					
EPID 694 - MPH Research Project*	3					
Total Credits Completed – All Semesters						Σ All Credits

*MPH Research Project - students who collect their own data may elect to receive 3 additional credits over two semesters.
NOTE: The MPH Program reserves the right to change course offerings.

Generalist Track Suggested Electives*

Fall Electives	
EPID 511 - Industrial Hygiene: Hazard ID & Evaluation	3
EPID 560 - Fundamentals of Data Collection, Management & Analysis	3
EPID 615 - Issues and Interventions - Communities of Color	3
EPID 617 - International Health	3
MICR 510 - Scientific Integrity	1
SBHD 611 - Health Literacy	3
Spring Electives	
EPID 512 - Industrial Hygiene: Methods of Hazard Control	3
EPID 541 - Principles of Waste Management	3
EPID 616 - Public Health Education	3
EPID 620 - Cancer Epidemiology	3
BIOS 544 - Statistical Methods II	3
BIOS 571 - Clinical Trials	3
Summer Electives	
EPID 555 - Bioterrorism and Public Health Preparedness	2
EPID 618 - Public Health Law	3
EPID 621 - Infectious Disease Epidemiology	3
EPID 693 - Principles of Human Nutrition	3
Fall Electives - 2nd fall only	
EPID 622 - Maternal & Child Health	3
BIOS 524 - Biostatistical Computing	3
BIOS 572 - Statistical Analysis of Biomedical Data	3

Semester	Advisor's Signature	Date Approved
Fall 2008		
Spring 2009		
Summer 2009		
Fall 2009		
Spring 2010		
Summer 2010		
Fall 2010		
Spring 2011		
Summer 2011		

**MPH Curriculum Planner – Social and Behavioral Science Track
45 Credits Minimum**

Faculty members who need this curriculum planner should obtain it from the Social and Behavioral Health, May Kennedy or Diane Zotti.