

## MPH Student Survey 2021

A student satisfaction survey is conducted annually (with the exception of 2020 due to Covid-19). The anonymous survey asks students to report on various dimensions of their experience in the MPH program and make recommendations for the future. MPH students completed an online satisfaction survey in March-April, 2021.

### Survey Instrument

The survey questions were identical to questions asked since 2016 to assess program improvement over time. The survey focuses on one's "experience as a student" and their overall satisfaction with the MPH program. A total of 15 ratings are requested, plus demographic questions. A final open-ended question provides the opportunity for students to express thoughts, comments or concerns regarding any aspect of the MPH experience.

### Dissemination of the Online Survey

The survey was administered online during the months of March and April 2021. An initial email was sent in early March providing the survey link. Seven days later, a second email was sent providing a reminder to complete the survey. In late March, following a week-long spring break, a third email was sent in April providing a final reminder to complete the survey. Students took the survey using Qualtrics.

Of the 37 students who received the invitation to take the online survey, 21 responded, for a response rate of 57%. Another 16 opened the survey but did not take it.

### Student Characteristics

Of the 21 students who responded to the survey, 57% (n=12) were in the Health Policy and Management (HPM) concentration, 14% (n=3) were in the Community Health Education (CHE) concentration, 14% (n=3) were in the Epidemiology concentration, and 14% (n=3) were in the Veterinary Public Health (VPH) concentration.

Five students were enrolled part time, and four were in dual degree programs (DVM-MPH or MS Nutrition-MPH).

Of the 21 students who responded, 76% (n=16) identified themselves as not racial or ethnic minority, and 24% (n=5) identified themselves as racial/ ethnic minority. Further, 67% (n=14) students identified themselves as female, 29% (n=6) identified themselves as male, and 5% (n=1) preferred not to disclose. Regarding the question about sexual orientation, 81% (n=17) identified not as a sexual minority, 14% (n=3) identified as sexual minority (LGBTQ), and 5% (n=1) preferred not to disclose.

### Satisfaction with Interactions with Faculty

Students were asked about their satisfaction with five aspects of interaction with faculty members. Response options were: 1=not very satisfied, 2=less than satisfied, 3=satisfied, 4=more than satisfied and 5=very satisfied.

	Mean	95% CI
<b>How satisfied are you with interactions with faculty?</b>		
Quality of faculty advising	3.8	3.40 – 4.20
Faculty encourage active student involvement in learning	3.8	3.44 - 4.22
Communications with faculty	3.9	3.47 – 4.26
Faculty show respect for students	4.1	3.77 – 4.51
Availability of faculty	3.8	3.48 – 4.18

Students were asked an open-ended question about the reason that affected their level of satisfaction regarding their interaction with the faculty. However, no response was recorded from any student for this question.

### Satisfaction with guidance in field practice and career planning

	Mean	95% CI
<b>How satisfied are you with the guidance in field practice and career planning?</b>		
Adequacy of guidance in preparing for field practice	3	2.57 – 3.43
Effectiveness of career planning with faculty/field coordinator	3	2.65 – 3.44

Students did not respond to the open-ended question explaining the reason for their level of satisfaction regarding the guidance on field practice or career planning.

### Satisfaction with MPH Memos and Listserv

	Mean	95% CI
<b>How satisfied are you with the provision of helpful information by the department?</b>		
MPH Memos	4.1	3.81 – 4.46
MPH listserv	4.1	3.78 – 4.40

Students did not respond to the open-ended question, “Please help us understand why you are less than or not very satisfied with the provision of information from the department.”

## Satisfaction with the opportunity to be engaged in department activities

	Mean	95% CI
<b>How satisfied are you with the opportunity to be engaged in department activities?</b>		
Provide input to the MPH program	3.6	3.16 – 4.11
Participate with the PHGSA	3.9	3.54 – 4.19

Students did not respond to the open-ended question, “Please help us understand why you are less than or not very satisfied with the opportunity to be engaged in department activities.”

## Coursework

Students reported their satisfaction with two aspects of coursework. In addition, they were asked whether class size was conducive to learning and the appropriateness of the challenge in their foundation and concentration courses which they were taking in the current semester. Response options for the class size question were 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree.

	Mean	95% CI
Courses expand professional competencies	3.5	3.01 – 3.90
Courses relevant for professional growth and development	3.5	3.05 – 3.88
Class size conducive to learning	4	3.58 – 4.33
Challenge offered by the foundation courses	2.61	2.37 – 2.87
Challenge offered by the concentration courses	2.81	2.59 – 3.03

Those students who reported less challenge than appropriate were asked, “Please help us understand why you feel the core courses you have taken or are currently taking offer somewhat less or far less challenge than needed for professional preparation.” However, no response was reported by any student.

## Overall Satisfaction with the MPH Program

Students were asked to rate their overall satisfaction with the MPH program. Among all students, 27% reported being satisfied, 32% were more than satisfied, and 32% were very satisfied, for a mean score of 3.82 out of five.

Finally, students answered to the question, “How can we improve the MPH program? Please share any recommendations you have for improving the program.” The responses were:

---

Offering Grant Writing course that doesn't conflict with the times of other classes. Integrate more research method concepts into courses, such as survey techniques in Community Health Assessment. That is one of the competencies I felt least prepared for. I don't think it needs to be super high-level academic research methods, but just some basic techniques and considerations.

---

Listen to Black students. No longer dismiss or passively address student concerns surrounding race.

---

While the faculty and professors are excellent, the majority of classes were much easier than I expected. I would like to see more rigorous material and more thought-provoking discussion and assignments that take a deeper dive into the material. I wish we were encouraged more to draw connections to other fields and issues, rather than taking a surface-level approach to many public health topics.

---

N/A; any issues will be resolved when in person classes are back.

---

I would have appreciated more detailed information about operations in the Knoxville area.

---

More epi and quantitative research focused listings/connections in emails. Award assistantships earlier, other programs inform students of assistantships in February and March which gives students time to search for other opportunities if they are not offered a departmental assistantship. Moving away from SPSS and SAS in curriculum and using an open source coding language like Python or R. If you understand one coding language learning other one is easy. Currently, my supervisor at my public health related job told me to learn Python or R instead of SPSS or SAS because a lot of organizations won't pay for an SPSS or SAS subscription. Additionally, if we focused on using one language in 530, 540 (and then 630 and 640 for phd or epi) that will develop serious proficiency and expertise in coding which would be extremely beneficial because coding skills are in high demand.

---

I think the VPH concentration gets left out of a lot of the on-campus activities in the MPH program because of scheduling conflicts. I think this could be improved by offering multiple times or offering more evening activities.

---

More special topics classes that focus possibly on Maternal and Child health. More diverse faculty. More public health sponsored events ie. Black Maternal Health Week

---

The experience with Dr. Davis left us really unsupported before and during our APE this semester. Amanda has been wonderful, but the department should have rallied to offer us more connections, opportunities for career development, community networking, job opportunities, etc. Also, for comps preparation, the PHGSA dropped the ball- instead of having just two study sessions (which we only had one), I think the department should connect all students taking comps at the beginning of the semester. Then, those students can create their own study plan, meet regularly, etc. We had to just ask around to see who was taking it, and we still missed people, especially since we did not have in-person classes. It also does not make sense for PHGSA members to host a study session when they themselves have not taken comps- could we have volunteer faculty host the study sessions?

---

I appreciate the fact that there is a desire to expand the diversity of the faculty.

---

Currently, I have no comments or suggestions regarding improvements. My experience thus far has been quite positive.

---

---

More guidance on electives to take or what opportunities to pursue (i.e. I think advisors should have more directed conversations from the beginning about career goals, certificates, minors, etc.) - More communication about how to prepare for comps and for a field placement (even as a first-year student. I feel like graduate schools goes by very quickly and I would like to prepare for these things early) - More opportunities for professional development, training, getting involved either in the department or on campus. Recommendations for how to get public health experience during graduate school and prepare for a career.

---

If there were a way to make courses more integrative with real life public health work, and offer areas to seek experience that would be great. Additionally, speaking from the HPM concentration stance, more courses or better structure for classes such as PUBH 525 and 612 would be best. Each of these classes didn't seem like overlaps, but instead a repetition of the same information, not giving us an opportunity to learn anything else.

---

I recognize that the program expanded significantly this semester, but the classes are very large for graduate level classes. It has appeared difficult for both faculty and students.

---

Improve communication to all students, including dual and part-time students. There is often a disconnect between student groups, that I think can make it difficult when working as groups in class or organizing comps study sessions. Provide more information on public health job searching, provide resources like resume/CV review, cover letter preparation. The career center doesn't have someone who specializes in public health careers, so this is a place the department could be really helpful.

---

Table. Satisfaction with Experience as a Student in the MPH Program

Experience as a Student	Mean Satisfaction				
	2021 (n=21)	2019 (n=31)	2018 (n=31)	2017 (n=21)	2016 (n=49)
Guidance on field practice	3	3.4	2.6	3.6	3.15
Effectiveness of career planning	3	3.3	2.6	3.8	3.28
Faculty show respect for students	4.1	4.4	4.1	4.6	3.78
Faculty encourage active student involvement in learning	3.8	4.4	4	4.3	3.69
Information obtained via MPH listserv	4.1	3.8	3.5	4	3.51
Communications with faculty	3.9	4.4	3.7	4.2	3.67
Opportunity to provide input (e.g. through opportunity to be a student representative to the Academic Program Committee)	3.6	3.6	3.3	3.8	3.33
Opportunity to participate with Public Health Graduate Student Association (PHGSA)	3.9	3.4	3.4	3.8	3.61
Quality of faculty advising	3.8	4.2	3.4	4	3.78
Information obtained via MPH Memos newsletter	4.1	3.7	3.1	3.9	3.29
Overall level of satisfaction with the MPH program	3.8	4.3	3.7	4	3.23
Courses are relevant for professional growth and development	3.5	3.9	3.6	3.7	3.14
Courses offer learning activities and experiences designed to expand professional competencies	3.5	3.9	3.4	3.7	3.15
<i>Total Average Satisfaction</i>	<i>3.70</i>	<i>3.90</i>	<i>3.42</i>	<i>3.95</i>	<i>3.43</i>

## Summary

The anonymous MPH student survey asks students to share their satisfaction with the MPH Program. The overall response rate was less than desired and is presented in comparison to past years. The overall satisfaction is slightly lower than in 2019. The survey was not administered in 2020 due to the onset of Covid-19. We suggest that some of the results were influenced by the impact of the pandemic i.e. online courses, restricted research opportunities and limited faculty interaction. However, that does not explain some of the persistently lower than desired ratings particularly for guidance on field practice and career planning.

We have implemented a number of changes over time to address these areas. For field placement, now Applied Practice Experience (APEX), we have increased access to information through information sessions every semester. We are also developing a Canvas site for enrollment early in the program where students can ask questions, interact with the coordinator and access all guiding documents. We had an interim coordinator for spring and summer 2021 after the recently-hired (August 2020) coordinator separated from the University in December. The turn-over and interruption in process clearly affected the preparation and experience for the students. We are on firm ground with the current coordinator.

We are looking at the comments regarding rigor of the courses. The competency-driven foundation courses are continually reviewed and updated as indicated. The trend had been moving up but 2021 showed a slight decline in satisfaction. All courses were online due to Covid-19, we again consider the impact on quality and perception.

The faculty is committed to offering a rigorous curriculum that prepares students for the job-market. We look forward to further feedback from students and will administer the survey in spring 2022.