

Master of Public Health Alumni Survey (2011): Major Findings

The University of Tennessee

An anonymous electronic survey of MPH alumni, graduated during calendar years 2006 – 2010, was completed in early 2012. The survey was designed to secure satisfaction ratings, information and recommendations from alumni to guide and assist the faculty and MPH Academic Program Committee in their quest to continuously improve the MPH degree program. The MPH program has three concentrations of study: Community Health Education (CHE), Health Planning & Administration (HPA), and Veterinary Public Health (VPH).

Survey Instrument

The survey instrument, modified from one utilized in early 2007, was further refined by several MPH faculty members. The 2011 version was converted to online format and pilot-tested with seven alumni, who graduated prior to spring 2006. Of these, three were CHE graduates, three were HPA graduates, and one was a VPH graduate. One of the CHE respondents was a dual MS-MPH graduate. These seven individuals were invited to test the link to the survey and the ease of movement through the questions. Following review of the pilot data and suggestions made by those completing the pilot, the MPH program director and alumni survey director made additional modifications to clarify wording.

Rating of satisfaction levels on a five-point Likert scale was requested. Regarding satisfaction levels, the survey items focused on one's "experience as a student" in the program and on the MPH program's contribution to increasing one's "personal and professional skills levels." Additionally, respondents were asked about perceived strengths, weaknesses, and overall value of the program. The survey system required a response to each of 22 items, plus demographic questions in order to advance in completing the survey. Opportunity for response to several open-ended questions was also provided on an optional basis. On average, respondents were able to complete the survey in approximately 10-15 minutes.

Dissemination of the online survey

The survey was administered online during the period of mid-November and due to the holidays continued through late January. An initial email in mid-November 2011 provided advance notification that an e-mail with the survey link was forthcoming. Five days later, a second e-mail was sent providing the survey link. On the last day of November, a third e-mail was sent providing a reminder to complete the survey. The alumni survey director, serving as the responsible graduate assistant, distributed the first three e-mails. A fourth e-mail from the MPH program director in mid-January 2012 provided a final reminder to complete the survey.

During calendar years 2006 – 2010, 130 MPH students were graduated. Of those 130, two graduates from a discontinued concentration were excluded. Of the 128 eligible alumni, e-mail addresses were missing for five individuals. Therefore, a total 123 alumni received the survey. Seventy-eight of 123 alumni completed the survey for an overall response rate of 63.4%. Two alumni did not complete the entire survey. These data were retained for analysis because 20 of

22 (90.9%) survey items were answered, which warranted keeping the responses. Data were downloaded to an electronic database and analyzed using IBM SPSS 19.

Demographic Information

Regarding demographic information, the survey requested information related to MPH degree concentration, graduation year, race, gender, age, and degree completion (full-time or part-time). These data were used to determine the distribution of survey respondents across each category and to determine the response rate based on the total number of survey respondents who graduated during calendar years 2006 – 2010. The distribution of respondents for each demographic question was fairly uniform. Sixty-four of the survey participants were MPH graduates and 14 were dual MS-MPH graduates. Fifty-eight percent of the 2006-2010 MPH alumni participated in the survey, and 77.8% of the MS-MPH alumni participated in the survey. The survey achieved a response rate well over 50% for all concentrations and for all graduation years, except 2006, for which the response rate was 44.0%.

Table 1. Respondents by Concentration

Concentration	Number	Percent	Response Rate*
CHE	30	38.5	61.2
HPA	33	42.3	60.0
VPH	15	19.2	78.9
Total	78	100	63.4

* Response Rate based on the percentage of total 2006 – 2010 alumni by concentration who responded to the survey.

In total, there were 49 CHE graduates, 55 HPA graduates, and 19 VPH graduates during calendar years 2006 - 2010 invited to participate in the survey. These numbers were used to calculate the response rate by concentration. Additionally, two CHE and three HPA graduates did not receive the survey due to faulty e-mail addresses.

Table 2. Respondents by Year

Graduation Year	Number	Percent	Response Rate*
2006	11	14.1	44.0
2007	14	17.9	56.0
2008	15	19.2	62.5
2009	23	29.5	85.2
2010	15	19.2	68.1
Total	78	100	63.4

* Response Rate based on the percentage of total 2006 – 2010 alumni by graduation year who responded to the survey

In total, there were 25 graduates from 2006, 25 from 2007, 24 from 2008, 27 from 2009, and 22 from 2010 invited to participate in the survey. These numbers were used to calculate the response rate by graduation year.

Of the 123 MPH students graduating during this time period who received the survey, three were Asian or Asian American, 20 were Black or African American, 98 were white and two were Hispanic. However, no survey respondents indicated they were of Hispanic/Latino origin.

Table 3. Respondents by Race and Ethnicity

Race	Number	Percent	Response Rate*
Asian or Asian American	1	1.3	33.3
Black or African American	11	14.1	55.0
White	66	84.6	67.3
Total	78	100	63.4

* Response Rate based on the percentage of total 2006 – 2010 alumni by race and ethnicity who responded to the survey.

The remaining demographic information indicates that the majority of respondents were female and 29 years of age or younger. In addition, the majority of respondents completed the MPH program as full-time students.

Table 4. Respondents by Gender

Gender	Number	Percent
Female	56	71.8
Male	17	21.8
Prefer not to Respond	5	6.4
Total	78	100

Table 5. Respondents by Age

Age	Number	Percent
<29	42	53.8
30-39	26	33.3
40-49	8	10.3
50 or older	2	2.6
Total	78	100

Table 6. Respondents by Full-time or Part-time Status as a Student

Student Status	Number	Percent
Full-time	54	69.2
Part-time	24	30.8
Total	78	100

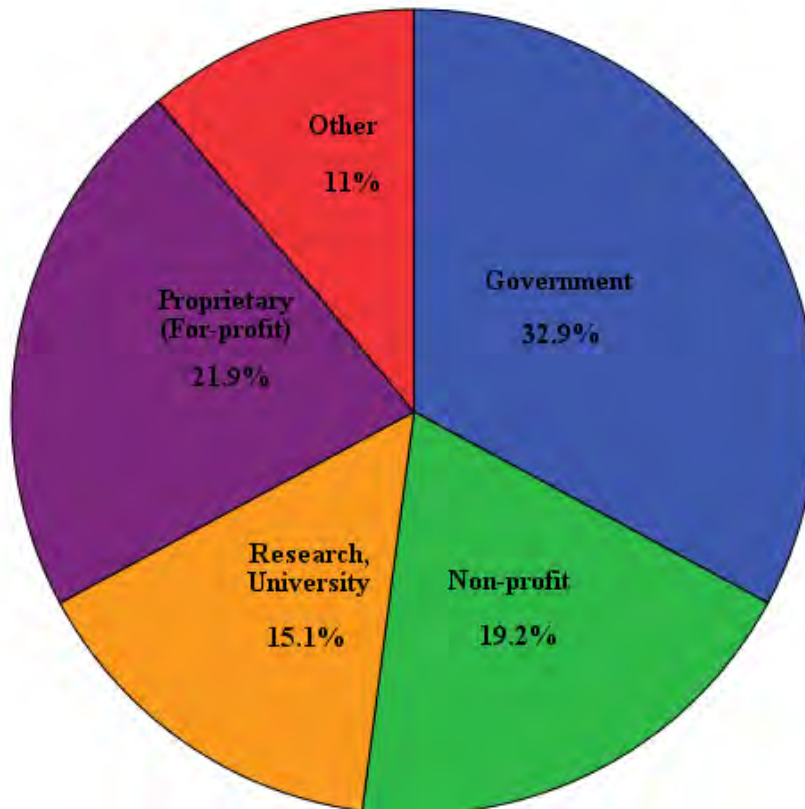
Employment Information

The survey sought information related to employment status, geographic location, skills utilized in employment, and type of employing organization. These data were used to determine the distribution of employed respondents, as well as the distribution of employing organizations by concentration and overall. Of the 73 respondents reporting current employment, 43 alumni (58.9%) were employed within Tennessee and 30 alumni (41.1%) were employed outside of Tennessee. In addition, 62 (84.9%) alumni indicated that they were employed in a position utilizing skills and knowledge developed during the MPH program.

Table 7. Respondents by Employment

Currently Employed	Number	Percent
Yes (full-time)	71	91.0
Yes (part-time)	2	2.6
No	5	6.4
Total	78	100

Figure 1. Respondents by Employing Organization (n=73)



Which is the best descriptor of the organization in which you are currently employed?

Overall, respondents were more likely to work in government than in any other type of organization. Employment by proprietary (for-profit) organizations (21.9%) and non-profit organizations (19.2%) were the second and third likeliest employing organizations. The highest percentage of CHE and VPH respondents indicated employment by government organizations, while the highest percentage of HPA respondents reported employment by proprietary organizations.

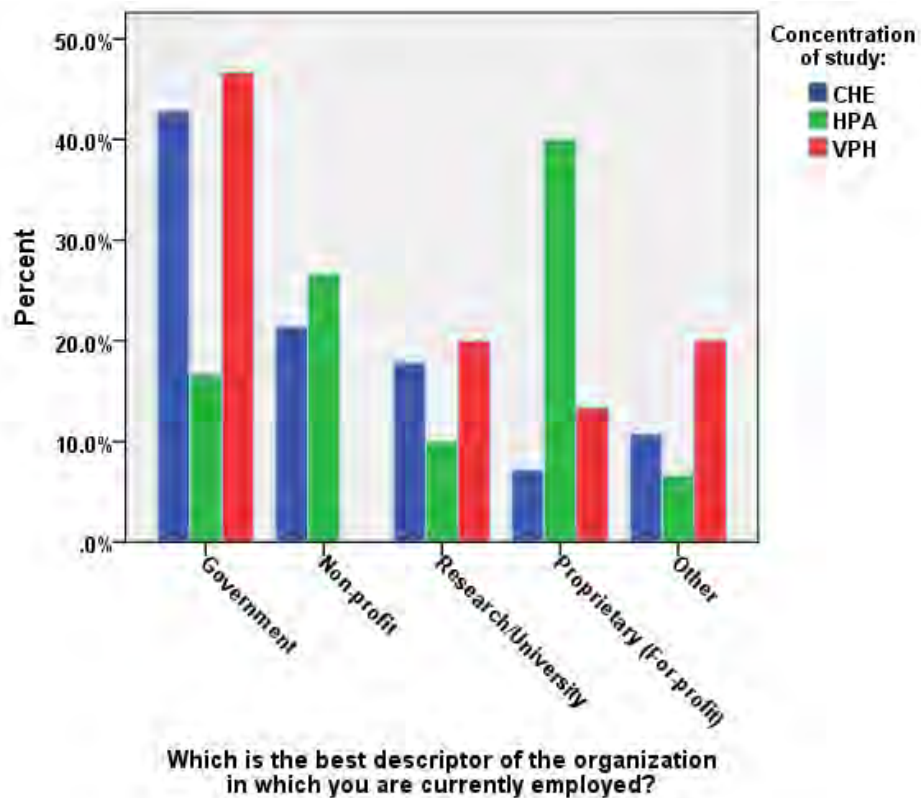
Table 8. Respondents¹ by Employing Organization and Concentration

Organization Descriptor	CHE		HPA		VPH		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Government	12	42.9	5	16.7	7	46.7	24	32.9
Non-profit	6	21.4	8	26.7	0	0	14	19.2
Research/University	5	17.9	3	10	3	20	11	15.1
Proprietary (For-profit)	2	7.1	12	40	2	13.3	16	21.9
Other ²	3	10.7	2	6.7	3	20	8	11
Total	28	100	30	100	15	100	73	100

¹Based on 73 employed respondents

²'Other' responses include: Contractor, Veterinary Medicine, Healthcare, Level 1 Trauma Center, and Employee Wellness

Figure 2. Respondents by Employing Organization and by Concentration



Value of the MPH Degree

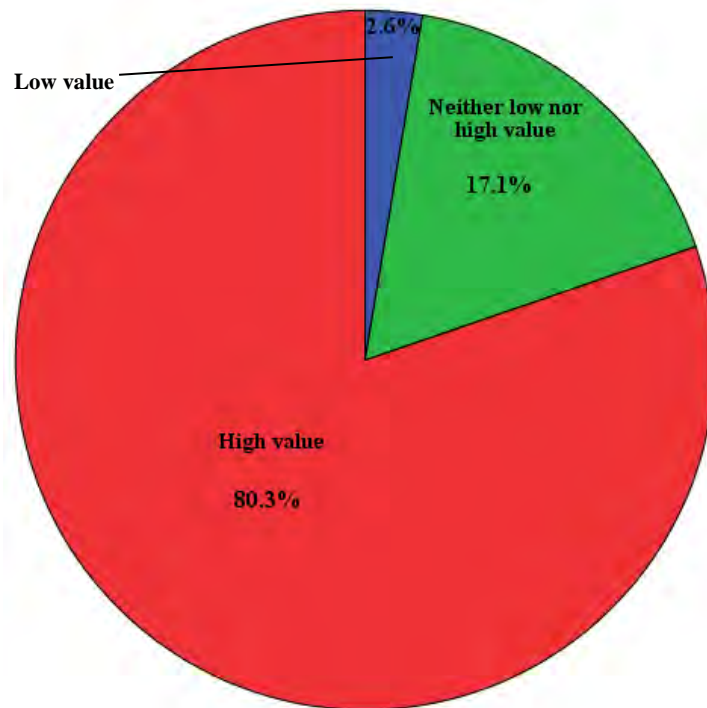
The survey sought information on the perceived value of the MPH degree in preparing alumni to achieve professional goals. Respondents were able to assign a value of low, neutral or high. These data were used to determine the distribution of values chosen by concentration and by total respondents. Overall, 80.3% of respondents assigned a high value to their MPH degree. The majority of respondents within each concentration also gave a high value to their MPH degree. When asked if they would recommend the MPH program to prospective students, 72 of 78 (92.3%) respondents replied in the affirmative. Four of the six who responded they would not recommend the program cited that educational exposures and skill-building opportunities in areas such as grant-writing and quantitative methodologies were inadequate.

Table 9. Value (or potential value) of MPH Degree (n=76)

Value	CHE		HPA		VPH		Total*	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Low	1	3.3	1	3.1	0	0	2	2.6
Neither Low Nor High	6	20	3	9.4	4	28.6	13	17.1
High	23	76.7	28	87.5	10	71.4	61	80.3
Total	30	100	32	100	14	100	76*	100

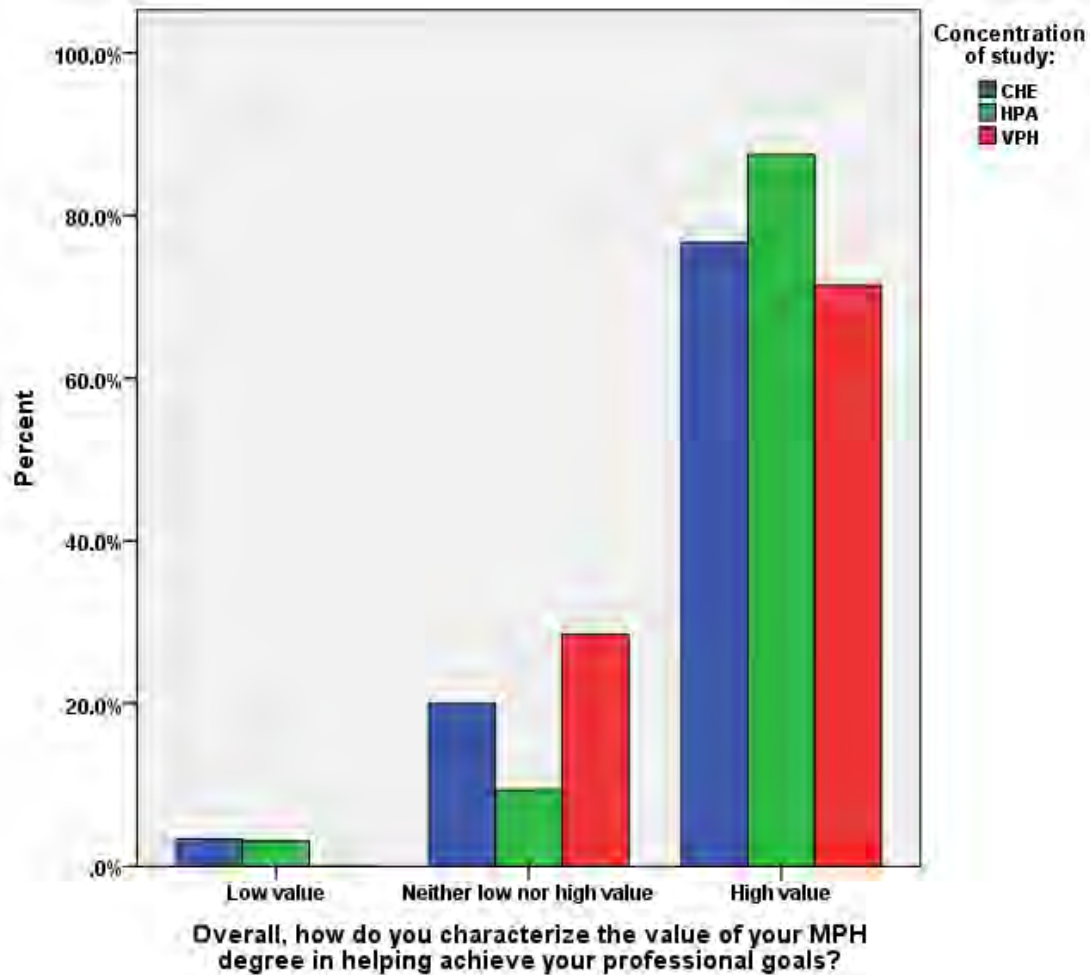
* One HPA and one VPH respondent did not answer this question.

Figure 3. Value of MPH Degree



Overall, how do you characterize the value (or potential value) of your MPH degree in helping achieve your professional goals?

Figure 4. Value of MPH Degree by Concentration



Experience as a Student

With regard to experience as a student, the survey sought information for seven different categories: usefulness of field internship (practice component), timely communications with faculty, overall quality of the MPH program, quality of faculty advising, support of the peer group, quality of instruction, and effectiveness of career guidance by faculty. A five-point Likert satisfaction scale was used with: 1=not very satisfied, 2=less than satisfied, 3=satisfied, 4=more than satisfied and 5=very satisfied. These data were used to determine the mean satisfaction distribution of experience by concentration, as well as overall.

When asked about student experience in the MPH program, respondents indicated overall satisfaction. Respondents overall reported they were “satisfied” or above in all seven categories and “more than satisfied” in two categories. Means for each category were closer to 4 than 3, suggesting that most respondents chose a higher satisfaction level. Overall, the lowest level of satisfaction was with effectiveness of career guidance.

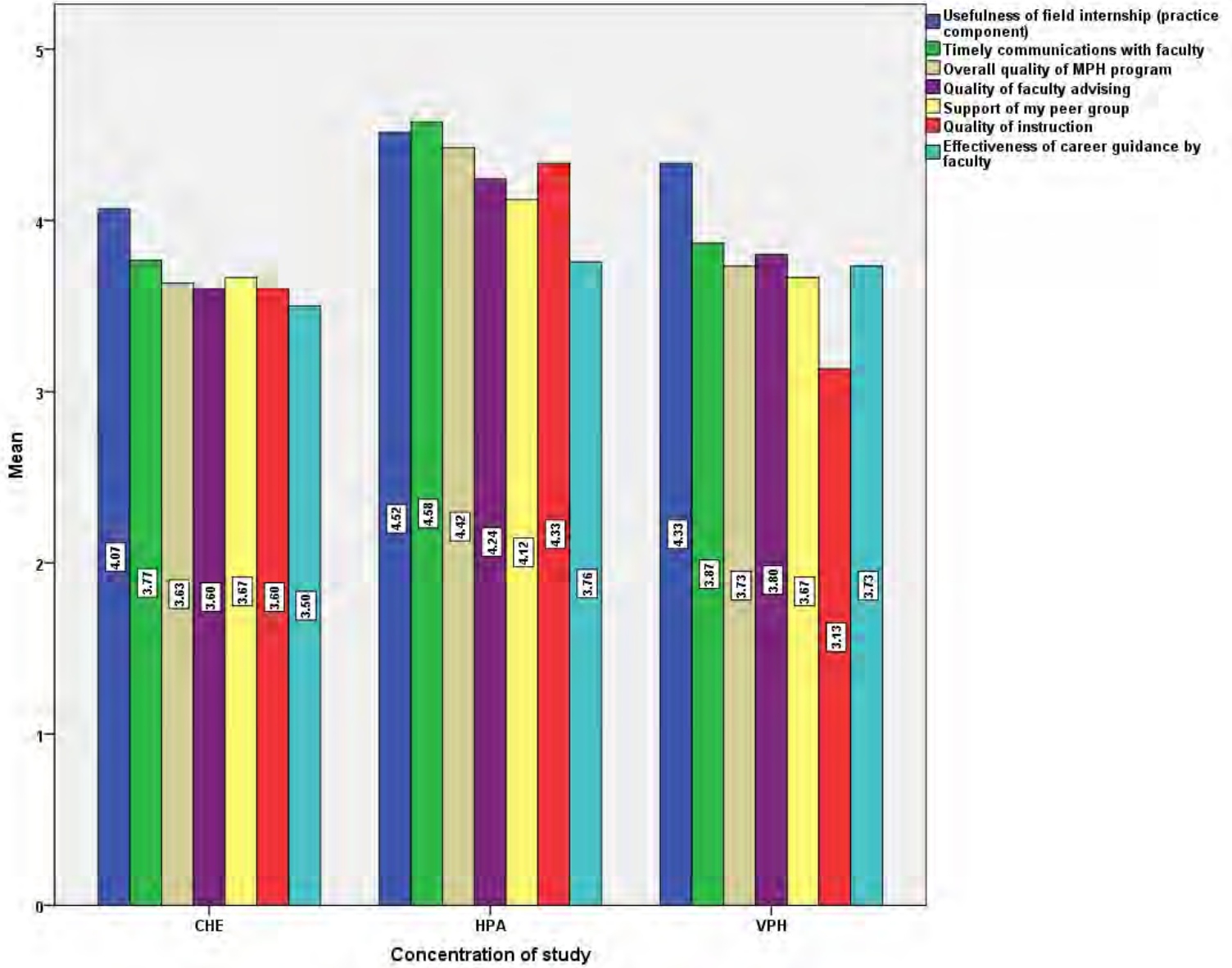
Table 10. Satisfaction with Student Experience in MPH Program (n=78)

Student Experience	Mean Satisfaction			
	CHE	HPA	VPH	Total
Usefulness of field internship (practice component)	4.07	4.52	4.33	4.31
Timely communications with faculty*	3.77	4.58	3.87	4.13
Overall quality of MPH program	3.63	4.42	3.73	3.99
Quality of faculty advising	3.60	4.24	3.80	3.91
Support of my peer group	3.67	4.12	3.67	3.86
Quality of instruction	3.60	4.33	3.13	3.82
Effectiveness of career guidance by faculty*	3.50	3.76	3.73	3.65
<i>Total Satisfaction with Student Experience</i>	<i>3.69</i>	<i>4.28</i>	<i>3.75</i>	<i>3.95</i>

* For timely communications with faculty and effectiveness of career guidance by faculty, no respondent chose “not very satisfied.”

Satisfaction levels based on concentration revealed the HPA respondents were “more than satisfied” with their experience in the MPH program. Both CHE and VPH respondents were “satisfied,” with both means around 3.70. The HPA means were highest among the three concentrations in all categories of student experience. HPA respondents were “more than satisfied” in every category except the effectiveness of career guidance by faculty, for which they were “satisfied,” CHE and VPH respondents were “more than satisfied” in one category, the usefulness of field internship (practice component).

Figure 5. MPH Program Satisfaction by Concentration



Personal/Professional Skills Levels

Satisfaction with the Program Helping Increase Personal/Professional Skills

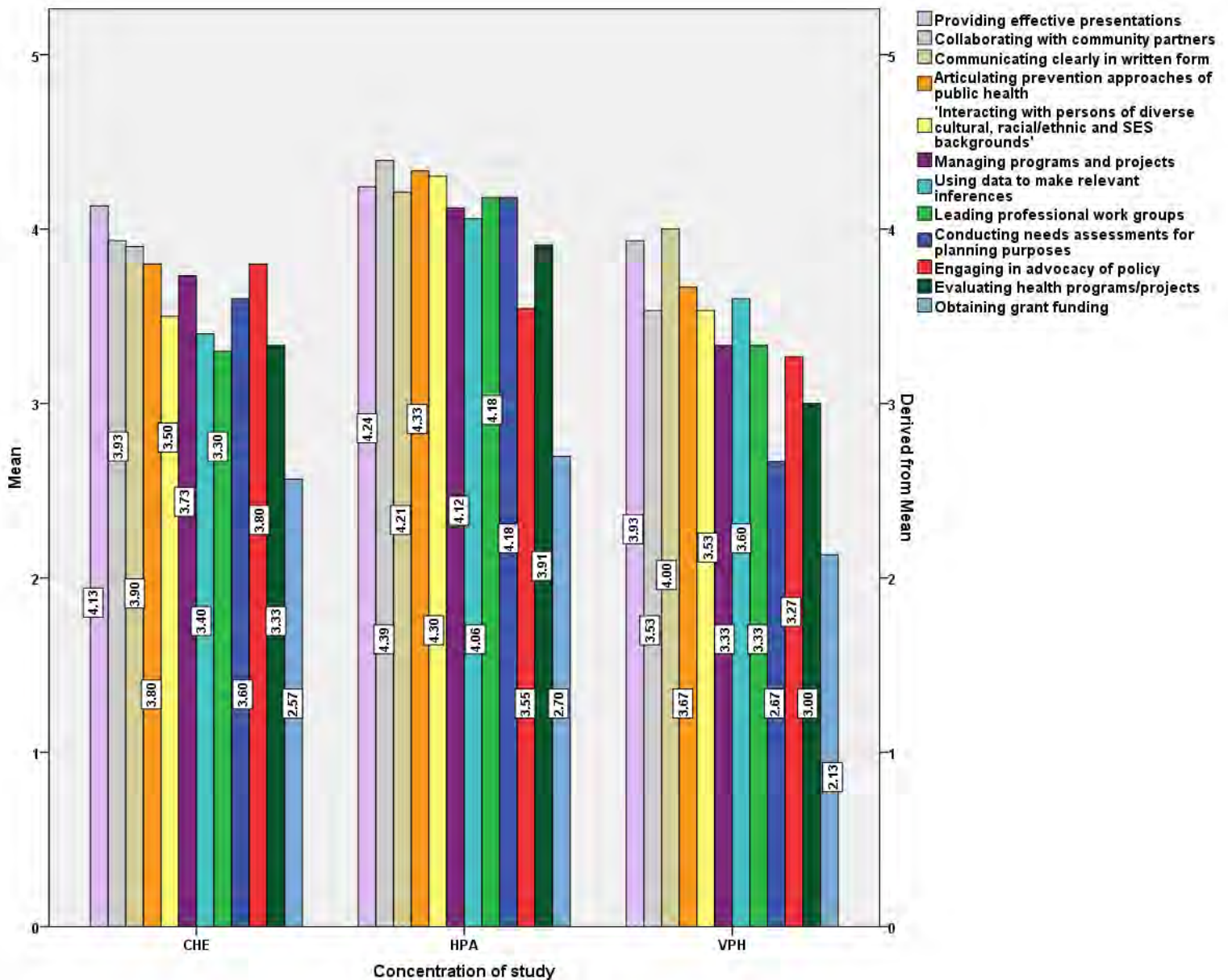
With regard to personal/professional skills levels, the survey sought information related to twelve categories including such skills as: providing effective presentations, collaborating with community partners, articulating prevention approaches of public health, managing programs and projects, leading professional work groups, conducting needs assessments for planning purposes and others. A five-point Likert satisfaction scale was used: 1=not very satisfied, 2=less than satisfied, 3=satisfied, 4=more than satisfied and 5=very satisfied. These data were used to determine the mean satisfaction distribution by concentration, as well as overall. Overall, respondents were satisfied with the MPH program in helping them increase their professional skills. Obtaining grant funding was the only skills area below a “satisfied” level with a total mean of 2.54. All other skill areas were well above the “satisfied” mean of 3. Respondents were “more than satisfied” with four of the skills areas: providing effective presentations, collaborating with community partners, communicating clearly in written form, and articulating prevention approaches of public health.

Table 11. Satisfaction with the Program Helping Increase Personal/Professional Skills (n=78)

Personal/Professional Skills Level	Mean Satisfaction			
	CHE	HPA	VPH	Total
Providing effective presentations	4.13	4.24	3.93	4.14
Collaborating with community partners	3.93	4.39	3.53	4.05
Communicating clearly in written form	3.90	4.21	4.00	4.05
Articulating prevention approaches of public health	3.80	4.33	3.67	4.00
Interacting with persons of diverse cultural, racial/ethnic and SES backgrounds	3.50	4.30	3.53	3.85
Managing programs and projects	3.73	4.12	3.33	3.82
Using data to make relevant inferences	3.40	4.06	3.60	3.72
Leading professional work groups	3.30	4.18	3.33	3.68
Conducting needs assessments for planning purposes	3.60	4.18	2.67	3.67
Engaging in advocacy of policy	3.80	3.55	3.27	3.59
Evaluating health programs/projects	3.33	3.91	3.00	3.51
Obtaining grant funding	2.57	2.70	2.13	2.54
<i>Total Average Satisfaction</i>	<i>3.58</i>	<i>4.01</i>	<i>3.33</i>	<i>3.72</i>

Satisfaction levels based on concentration revealed the HPA concentration alumni were “more than satisfied” overall with the MPH program in helping them increase personal/professional skills. The CHE and VPH concentrations were “satisfied.” The HPA means were highest among the three concentrations in every category except for the skill area of engaging in advocacy of policy. HPA respondents were “more than satisfied” in 9 of 12 categories. CHE respondents were “more than satisfied” in only one of 12 skill areas, and VPH respondents were “more than satisfied” in one of 12 skills areas, as well. CHE respondents were “more than satisfied” with providing effective presentations, and VPH respondents were “more than satisfied” with communicating clearly in written form.

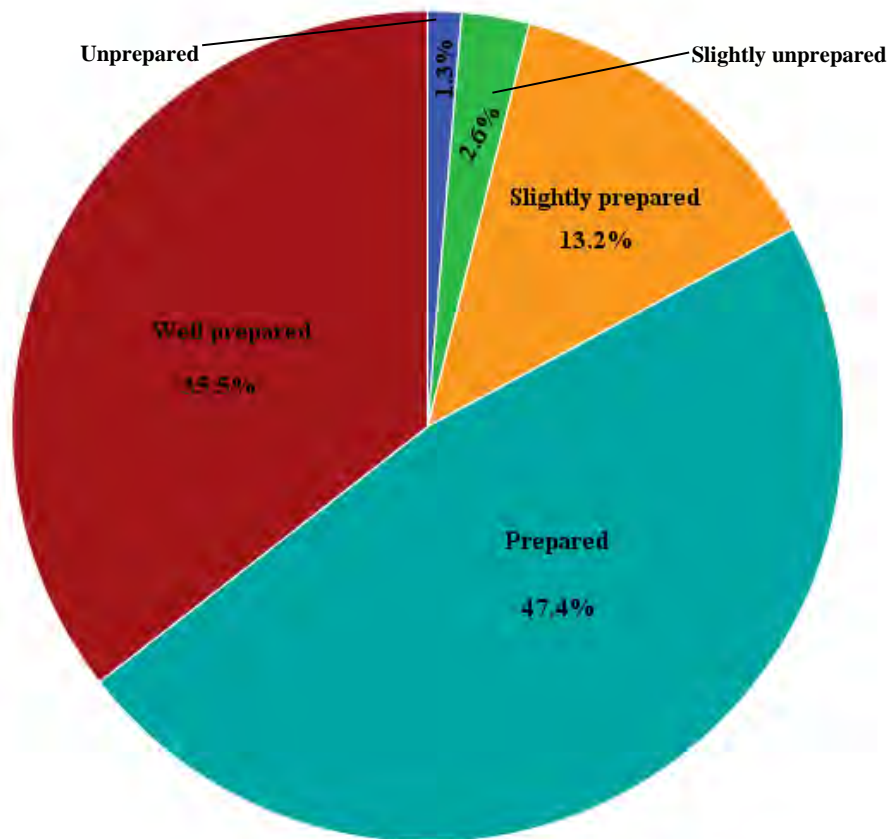
Figure 6. Satisfaction with the Program Helping Increase Personal/Professional Skills



Preparation for Effective Work Performance

In addition, the survey sought information related to perceptions about preparation for effective work performance. A five-point Likert preparedness scale was used: 1=unprepared, 2=slightly unprepared, 3=slightly prepared, 4=prepared and 5=well prepared. These data were used to determine the distribution of preparedness by concentration, as well as the mean preparedness overall. The majority of respondents (82.9%) indicated that they were “prepared” or “well prepared” for effective work performance. Specifically, 47.4% of respondents felt “prepared” and 35.5% felt “well prepared.” The majority of HPA respondents felt “well prepared,” while the majority of CHE and VPH respondents felt “prepared.”

Figure 7: Perceptions of Preparation for Effective Work Performance (n=76)



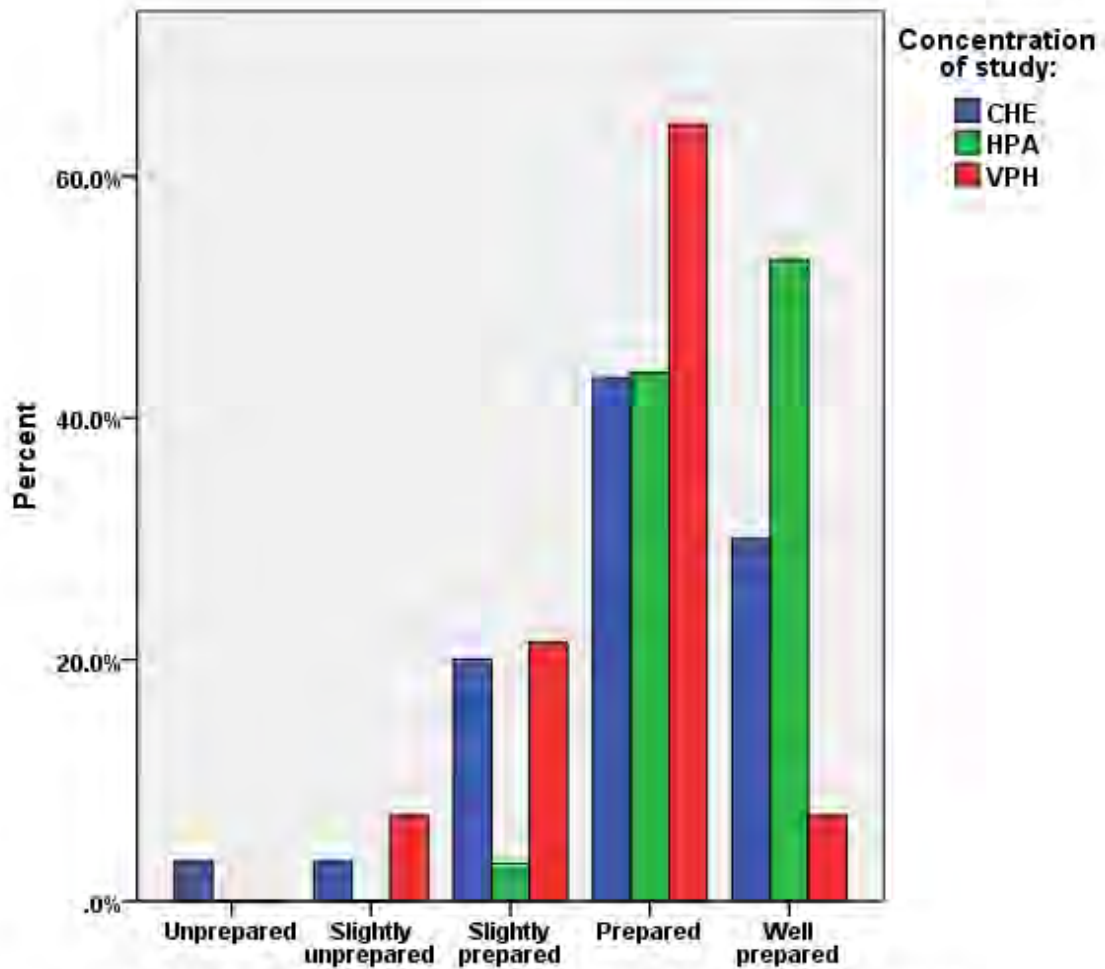
Regarding the MPH program, how do you feel about your preparation for effective work performance?

Table 13. Preparation for Effective Work Performance (n=76)

Preparation	CHE		HPA		VPH		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Unprepared	1	3.3	0	0	0	0	1	1.3
Slightly unprepared	1	3.3	0	0	1	7.1	2	2.6
Slightly prepared	6	20.0	1	3.1	3	21.4	10	13.2
Prepared	13	43.3	14	43.8	9	64.3	36	47.4
Well prepared	9	30.0	17	53.1	1	7.1	27	35.5
Total	30	100	32	100	14	100	76*	100

* One HPA and one VPH respondent did not answer the question

Figure 8. Preparation for Effective Work Performance by Concentration



Regarding the MPH program, how do you feel about your preparation for effective work performance?

Comments Section

To determine qualitative information, alumni were asked four open-ended questions regarding the effectiveness of the MPH program. They were also given the opportunity to provide general additional comments. A response was not required for any of these questions. A sampling of comments from each open-ended question has been included. Table 15 represents the overall response rate for each question by individual alumni in each concentration. All response rates for each question, by concentration and in total, were over 50%. All questions, except for “suggested improvements,” had response rates of over 60% within each concentration and response rates of over 64% in total.

Table 15. Comment Question Response Rate

Question Category	CHE		HPA		VPH		Total	
	Number	Percent*	Number	Percent*	Number	Percent*	Number	Percent*
Liked Most	24	80.0	26	78.8	10	66.7	60	76.9
Liked Least	19	63.3	20	60.6	11	73.3	50	64.1
Suggested Improvements	24	80.0	23	69.7	8	53.3	55	70.5
Value Chosen	19	63.3	20	60.6	12	80.0	51	65.4
Total Respondents	30	100	33	100	15	100	78	100

* All percentages are based on the number of respondents by concentration providing input. Example: CHE, Liked Most Question Category calculation: 24 of 30 CHE respondents commented, resulting in 80% response rate.

Respondents were asked, “What did you like MOST about the MPH program?”

Liked Most about the MPH Program Comments

- “The HPA concentration classes were very well organized and provided skill-building opportunities in research, writing and accounting. Particularly all assignments had purpose and meaning. For these courses, there were fair opportunities for asking questions and receiving guidance on assignments.”
- “I most like that it taught me the same principles as the Public Health Nutrition courses but forced me to get outside...[my] box and apply the same principles to other aspects of health.”
- “I liked that the course work included projects which required a practical application of skills learned in the course.”
- “My instructors for the most part were wonderful mentors, great to talk to and completely supportive the entire time I attended the University.”
- “The flexibility of the program and the diversity in terms of background and experience of both the faculty and students.”
- “The interaction with my peers! There is so much value in communication and when I was at UT, the... experience and communication with both peers, clients and professors was invaluable.”
- “I enjoyed the quality of instructors and the positive environment.”
- “I enjoyed learning about the practice of public health, making life-long friends and becoming not only colleagues, but friends with many of the instructors.”

- “The faculty was excellent. They were all approachable, well-spoken, and knowledgeable.”
- “The opportunity to do public health projects in the community that utilized the skills we learned in the classroom and taught us hands-on experience that can’t be learned from a book.”

Respondents were asked, “What did you like LEAST about the MPH program?”

Liked Least about the MPH Program Comments

- “My biostats class, the content of which was not rigorous enough. It also lacked a good intro to that sub-discipline.”
- “Lack of rigor in the classroom as well as too few of my peers who provided intellectual stimulation/peer support.”
- “Use of adjunct faculty for core courses including epidemiology and biostatistics.”
- “I felt like some of my fellow students were not very serious about their studies and that detracted from the experience.”
- “Not very many public health courses with a veterinary concentration.”
- “That certain classes were only offered at certain times (day v. night) or only certain semesters.”
- “I do not feel as if I have a strong background in analyzing data...Many of the jobs I applied to required analyst skills and I fell short in this area.”
- “I was rather disappointed in the course offerings concerning epidemiology and biostatistics...Emphasis needs to be placed on SPSS and SAS software packages. I have been rejected from several job opportunities specifically because I have not had exposure to such software.”

Respondents were asked, “What would you recommend to improve the program?” The need for more grant writing, research methods, epidemiology and statistics were mentioned most often by CHE and VPH respondents. The VPH respondents suggested that more classes specific to veterinary public health be added to the concentration.

Suggested Improvements for the MPH Program Comments

- “Increase the variety of classes offered for VPH concentration, or at least increase the types of classes that would be approved to satisfy degree requirements.”
- “It needs to be a more serious curriculum. Overall, I expected to learn more in the graduate program.”
- “I would recommend requiring a grant writing course or at least offering one more often and a greater focus on analyzing data.”
- “...provide more elective choices within each concentration, and offer the core courses every semester!”
- “More interface with the local hospital community (i.e., for those with the health admin concentration could spend time shadowing execs outside the realm of internships).”
- “...the program appears to be oriented towards community practice... and does not offer many choices for students interested in private industry or corporate health work.”

- “I would recommend more required courses in research methods and grant/proposal writing.”
- “I would recommend placing more emphasis on the epidemiology and biostatistics courses and respective software packages, such as SPSS or SAS. Additionally, setting up intern or volunteer opportunities with local organizations would be extremely beneficial for future networking.”
- “...career advice or help landing that first job (possibly through faculty/alumni networking).”
- “Add a community partnership or project to all classes, even if just a small component.”

The question regarding the value of preparation to achieve professional goals requested that respondents provide rationale for their choice of “high,” “neither high nor low,” or “low” value of the MPH program. Respondents were asked, “Why did you choose this value?”

Value Chosen Comments

- “The MPH degree has opened many doors and provided many opportunities for me. Without the knowledge and skills learned in the MPH program, I would not be where I am today.”
- “I would not have the job that I have without my MPH degree. This degree has allowed me to pursue a more diverse career path.”
- “I came into the program unsure if public health was what I wanted to do. By the end, I was certain. Having this degree along with my CHES certification and various experiences in working with the community have set me apart as a candidate for public health positions.”
- “Obtaining the MS-MPH degree has enabled me to obtain a variety of job opportunities within the community.”
- “Much of the knowledge gained in the program was new to me, and it has expanded my range of capabilities enormously.”
- “It is absolutely necessary for veterinarians interested in public health to obtain an MPH.”
- “I chose this value because the MPH makes me more diverse in the working world and also provided some other experiences for me to pull from in my professional life.”
- “The MPH is a versatile and practical professional degree. I believe it has prepared me with the content and knowledge as well as credentialing to grow into management and supervisory roles in the future.”

Summary

The anonymous MPH alumni survey sought information from 123 alumni who graduated during calendar years 2006 – 2010. The overall response rate for the survey was 78 of 123, or 63.4%. There was a fairly even distribution of respondents with regard to demographics including concentration, graduation year, and race. With regard to employment, 84.9% of respondents indicated they were employed in a position utilizing skills and knowledge they developed during the MPH program. In addition, 32% of respondents worked in government organizations, making it the most common employing organization. With regard to value, 80.3% of respondents assigned a high value to their MPH degree. This high value was reported by all three

concentrations. Ninety-two percent of respondents indicated they would recommend the MPH program to prospective students. Respondents were “more than satisfied” overall with student experiences and reported a high level of satisfaction overall with the MPH program in helping increase personal/professional skills. In addition, 82.9% of respondents indicated they were “prepared” or “well prepared” for effective work performance.

With regard to the comments received, a fairly high response rate was found for each question within concentrations, as well as overall. Academics was a major factor in all open-ended questions, except the value chosen question. When asked what respondents liked most and liked least about the MPH program, most comments fell into the “academics” category. Major themes within this category included positive class experiences, as well as inadequate preparation in the areas of biostatistics and epidemiology (additional). When respondents were asked to suggest improvements for the MPH program, “academics” again was the category with the most comments. Within this category, 28.6% commented on a need for increased class variety. With regard to value of the MPH program, respondents were asked the reason for their choice of value (high, low, neither high nor low). The majority of respondents chose a “high value”. Most respondents commented on increased career opportunities and the belief that obtaining an MPH degree was necessary for their career.

Although 37% of graduates during calendar years 2006 – 2010 did not respond to the survey, it can be assumed that the respondent data can be generalized to all alumni and can be utilized to guide faculty and the MPH Academic Program Committee in improving the program. The demographic characteristics of the respondents were similar to characteristics found for all alumni of the MPH program. By keeping the survey completely anonymous, the MPH program director and alumni survey director endeavored to provide an opportunity for honest, non-influenced responses by participants. However, maintaining anonymity prevented follow-up requests directly to non-respondents. Comments should be considered cautiously, because the MPH program and its academic home have changed over the years since these alumni graduated. Although the comments provide important insights regarding student perspectives of the program from calendar years 2006 through 2010, the data for all open-ended questions are limited and may not provide a generalizable perspective for every category addressed.

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