

## **Master of Public Health Student Survey (2014)**

### **The University of Tennessee**

An anonymous electronic survey of MPH students was completed in March 2014. The survey was designed to secure satisfaction ratings, information and recommendations from current students 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 Policy & Management (HPM), and Veterinary Public Health (VPH).

### **Survey Instrument**

A Web-based survey instrument identified as Qualtrics was used to create and conduct the online survey. The survey questions from 2013 were revised and modified by the MPH program director and student survey director. Two new questions were added to the survey related to level of challenge offered by core courses and concentration courses.

Rating of satisfaction levels on a five-point Likert scale was requested. The survey items focused on one's "experience as a student" in the MPH program. Additionally, respondents were asked about their overall satisfaction with the MPH program. The survey system required a response to each of nine sets of items, plus demographic questions in order to advance in completing the survey. Opportunity for response to an open-ended question was provided on an optional basis. On average, respondents were able to complete the survey in approximately five minutes.

### **Dissemination of the Online Survey**

The survey was administered online during the month of March 2014. 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 providing a second reminder to complete the survey.

Of the current MPH students, all 50 received the survey via email. Forty-three of 50 students completed the survey for an overall response rate of 86%. Data were downloaded to an electronic database and analyzed using IBM SPSS 20.

### **Demographic Information**

Regarding demographic information, the survey requested information related to MPH degree concentration, degree completion (full-time or part-time), and hours completed to date. These data were used to determine the distribution of survey respondents across each survey item. The response rate by concentration was over 80% for all concentrations.

Table 1. Respondents by Concentration

Concentration	Number	Percent	Response Rate*
CHE	16	37.2	84.2
HPM	17	39.5	85.0
VPH	10	23.3	91.0
Total	43	100.0	86.0

\* Response Rate based on the percentage of total students by concentration who responded to the survey

Note: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Table 2. Respondents by Full-time or Part-time Student Status (n=43)

Student Status	Number	Percent
Full-time	35	81.4
Part-time	8	18.6
Total	43	100.0

Note: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Table 3. Respondents by Hours Completed to Date (n=43)

Hours Completed	Number	Percent
0-10	16	37.2
11-20	14	32.6
21-30	5	11.6
31- 40	5	11.6
41 – 50	2	4.7
51 – 60	0	0
61 – 70	1	2.3
Total	43	100

Note: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

### **Experience as a Student in the MPH Program**

The survey sought information related to experience as a student addressing 13 different items such as: quality of faculty advising, faculty encouragement of active student involvement in learning, helpfulness of information obtained via MPH listserv, adequacy of guidance in preparing for field practice, opportunity to provide input to the MPH Program, overall level of satisfaction with the MPH program 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 by concentration, as well as overall. The items regarding field practice and career planning guidance were answered by 31 and 30 respondents respectively; for

these two items, respondents were given a six-point Likert scale with the addition of 6=not applicable. Therefore, respondents who chose “not applicable” were not applied to the mean calculation for the items related to field practice guidance and career planning.

Table 4. Satisfaction with Experience as a Student in the MPH Program  
(n=43, unless otherwise noted)

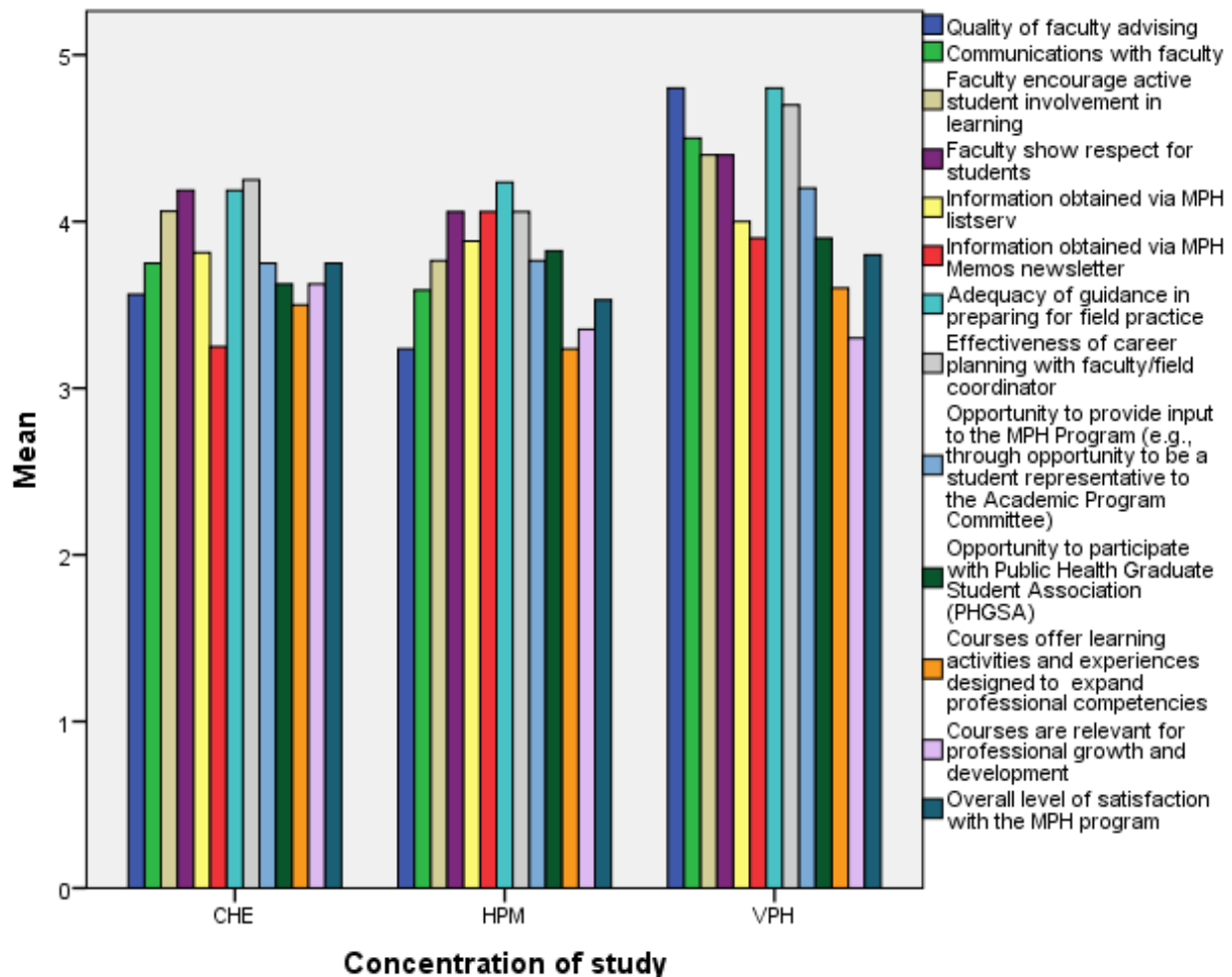
<b>Experience as a Student</b>	<b>Mean Satisfaction</b>			
	<b>CHE</b>	<b>HPM</b>	<b>VPH</b>	<b>Total</b>
Adequacy of guidance in preparing for field practice (n=31)	4.19	4.24	4.80	4.35
Effectiveness of career planning with faculty/field coordinator (n=30)	4.25	4.06	4.70	4.28
Faculty show respect for students	4.19	4.06	4.40	4.19
Faculty encourage active student involvement in learning	4.06	3.76	4.40	4.02
Information obtained via MPH listserv is helpful	3.81	3.88	4.00	3.88
Communications with faculty	3.75	3.59	4.50	3.86
Opportunity to provide input (e.g. through opportunity to be a student representative to the Academic Program Committee)	3.75	3.76	4.20	3.86
Opportunity to participate with Public Health Graduate Student Association (PHGSA)	3.63	3.82	3.90	3.77
Quality of faculty advising	3.56	3.24	4.80	3.72
Information obtained via MPH Memos newsletter is helpful	3.25	4.06	3.90	3.72
Overall level of satisfaction with the MPH program	3.75	3.53	3.80	3.67
Courses are relevant for professional growth and development	3.63	3.35	3.30	3.44
Courses offer learning activities and experiences designed to expand professional competencies	3.50	3.24	3.60	3.42
<i>Total Average Satisfaction</i>	<i>3.79</i>	<i>3.74</i>	<i>4.18</i>	<i>3.86</i>

Overall, respondents were “satisfied” with their experience as a student in the MPH Program. For the 13 items overall, the level of satisfaction was close to “more than satisfied,” with a mean nearing 3.9. Respondents were “more than satisfied” with four items; adequacy of guidance in preparing for field practice, effectiveness of career planning with faculty/field coordinator, faculty show respect for students, and faculty encourage active student involvement in learning.

Satisfaction levels based on concentration revealed the VPH respondents were “more than satisfied” with their experience in the MPH program, with a total mean of 4.18. Responses from both CHE and HPM respondents were close to “more than satisfied,” with a mean nearing 3.8. The VPH respondents were “more than satisfied” with eight items and “satisfied” with five items. The CHE respondents were “more than satisfied” with four items, faculty encourage active student involvement in learning, faculty show respect for students, adequacy of guidance in preparing for field practice, and effectiveness of career planning with faculty/field coordinator. They were

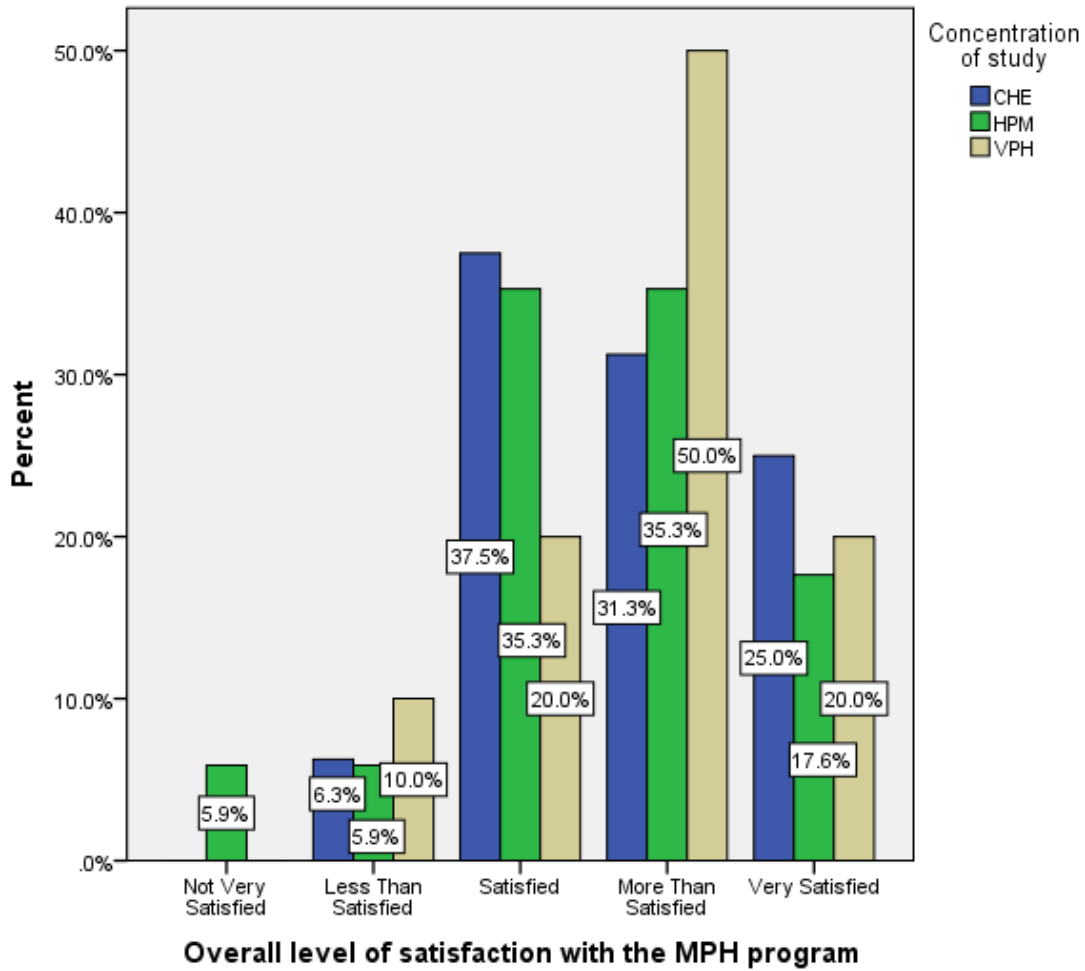
“satisfied” with all other items. The HPM respondents were also “more than satisfied” with four items; faculty show respect for students, information obtained via MPH Memos newsletter is helpful, adequacy of guidance in preparing for field practice, and effectiveness of career planning with faculty/field coordinator. They were “satisfied” with all other items.

Figure 1. Satisfaction with Experience as a Student in the MPH Program by Concentration



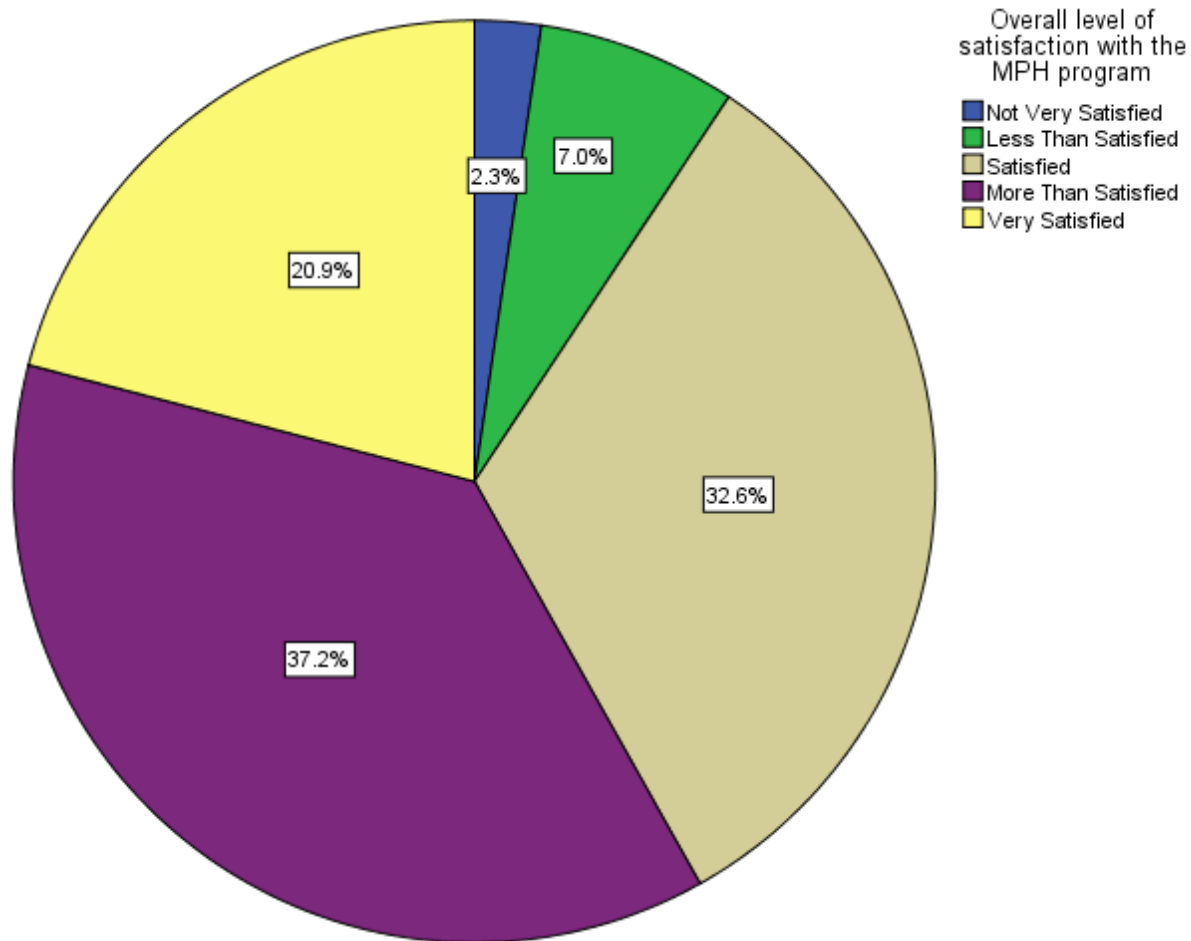
The survey also sought information about overall satisfaction with the MPH program. Overall, respondents were “satisfied” with a total mean of 3.67. All concentrations had 100% of respondents “satisfied” or higher with the program, with means of 3.75 for CHE, 3.53 for HPM, and 3.80 for VPH respectively. Approximately 6% of the HPM respondents were “not very satisfied” with the MPH program. Small proportions of respondents from all concentrations reported that they were “less than satisfied” with the program; 6.3% for CHE, 5.9% for HPM and 10.0% for VPH.

Figure 2. Overall Satisfaction with the MPH Program by Concentration



Note: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding

Figure 3. Overall Satisfaction with the MPH Program (n=43)

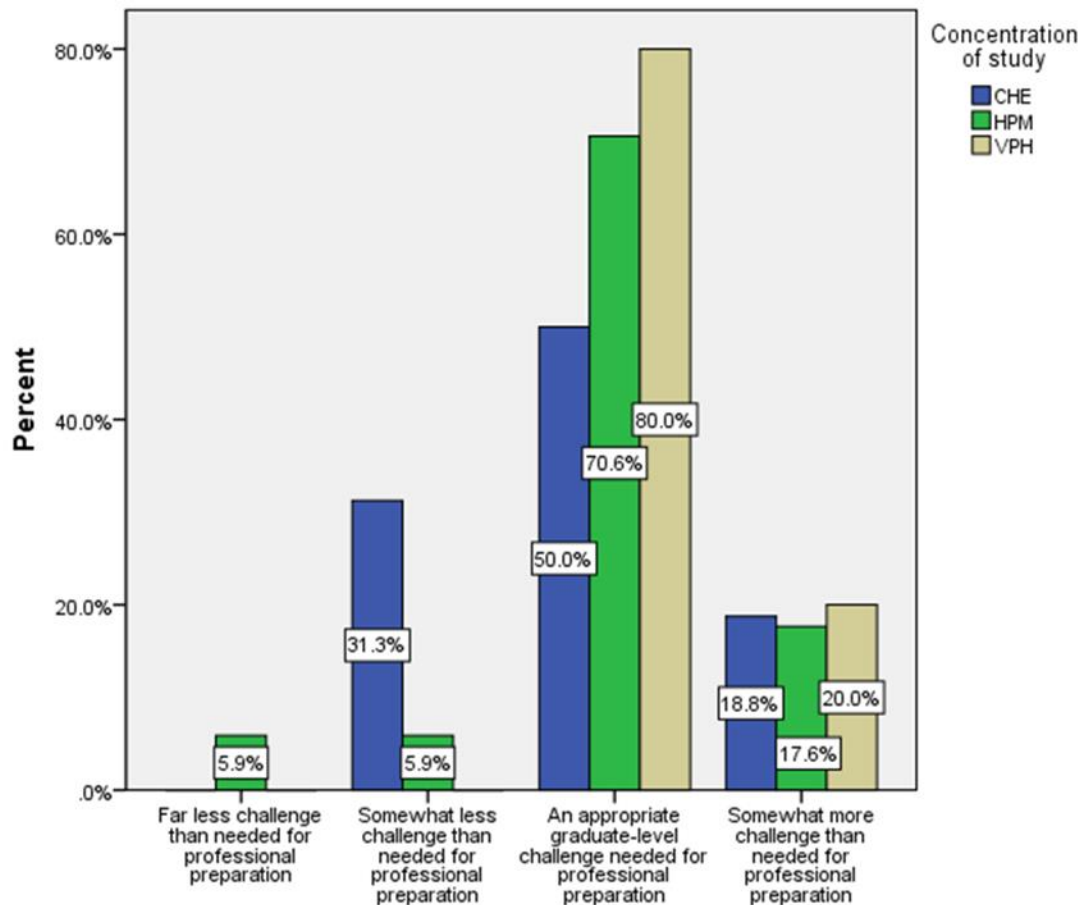


**Overall Satisfaction with the MPH Program**

Note: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding

In addition, the survey sought information related to level of challenge offered by both core and concentration courses. Overall, the majority of respondents (65%) indicated that the core courses that they had taken offer an appropriate graduate-level challenge needed for professional preparation. Only 2% of respondents indicated that the core courses offer far less challenge than needed for professional preparation. Level of challenge offered by the core courses based on concentration revealed that the highest proportions of students from all three concentrations thought that the core courses offer an appropriate graduate-level challenge needed for professional preparation; 50.0% CHE, 70.6% HPM, and 80.0% VPH. However, 31.3% of the CHE respondents and 11.8% of the HPM respondents indicated that the core courses offer somewhat less challenge than needed for professional preparation or far less challenge than needed for professional preparation.

Figure 4. Level of Challenge offered by Core Courses by Concentration (n=43)

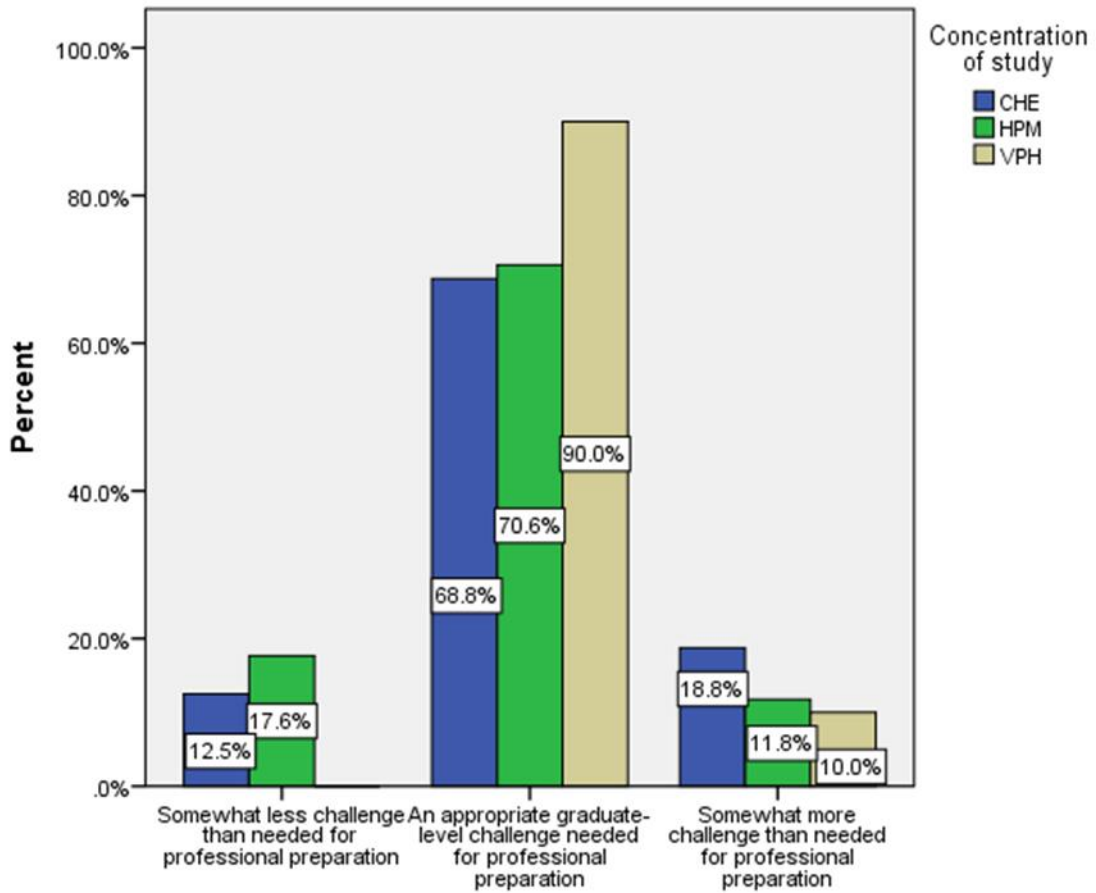


**Question: The core courses (510, 520, 530, 537, 540 and/or 555) that I have taken (including this semester) offer...**

Note: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding

Overall, the majority of respondents (74%) indicated that the concentration courses that they had taken offer an appropriate graduate-level challenge needed for professional preparation. The highest proportions of students from all three concentrations thought that the concentration courses offer an appropriate graduate-level challenge needed for professional preparation; 68.8% CHE, 70.6% HPM, and 90.0% VPH. However, 12.5% of the CHE respondents thought that the concentration courses offer somewhat less challenge than needed for professional preparation while 18.8% of the CHE respondents indicated that they offer somewhat more challenge than needed for professional preparation. For the HPM concentration, 17.6% of the respondents thought that the concentration courses offer somewhat less challenge than needed for professional preparation while 11.8% of the respondents found the concentration courses more challenging than needed for professional preparation. Ten percent of the VPH respondents indicated that the concentration courses offer somewhat more challenge than needed for professional preparation.

Figure 5. Level of Challenge offered by Concentration Courses (n=43)



**Question: The concentration courses (CHE, HPM or VPH) that I have taken (including this semester) offer...**

Note: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding



## **Recommendations for Improving the MPH Program**

Students were given the opportunity to respond to one open-ended question about improvement. A total of twenty-eight students responded to the optional question “Do you have any recommendations for improving the MPH program?” Of the 28 responses, three consisted of “not yet,” “no, not at this time,” and “N/A” and four offered positive comments. For those providing narrative comments, the response rate was 58.1% and some respondents provided multiple recommendations. The comments addressed areas which students believed should be improved. Highlights of these recommendations are categorically grouped below:

Several comments addressed the need to improve instruction. Respondents indicated:

- Some of the faculty members do not appear to be invested in the overall student's interest. .... This less than stellar experience can be attributed to a lack of preparation, contribution, and clear vision from the professor teaching the course.
- More focus on application-based projects than tests.
- I recommend better evaluations of your courses and professors so students are properly prepared and feel as though they are not wasting money for an education.
- Teachers who have other jobs should not be a part of this program, as they do not have time for the students. Classes should incorporate other types of organizations that impact health rather than just health departments and hospitals.
- Coordinate classroom projects so that overlap does not occur. Similar projects (are) done in same semester or following semesters in vastly different classes.
- Faculty (should) be more cognizant of student workload. I understand there might not be any way to change this, but I feel that all of my papers/exams are all due within a week of each other for each of my classes.

Over one-quarter of the responses indicated that improvements are needed with the Biostatistics course. Respondents cited:

- After taking Biostatistics, I still do not have a firm understanding of basic statistics. Perhaps this core course could be revised to enhance learning of basic stats concepts.
- I am very satisfied and happy with all aspects of the program besides my biostatistics course.
- I feel highly unprepared for any situation that will involve statistical analyses.
- Make Biostatistics more relevant to professional needs for public health field.
- Ensure that students get the skills they need in Biostatistics to succeed in other classes.
- Biostatistics class needs a major change.

Respondents also indicated that more attention to statistical software packages was needed:

- I would recommend more involvement of data analysis systems (SAS, SPSS, Epi Info, etc.) or at least an introduction of them.
- Epidemiology class needs to incorporate learning of software packages.

A few respondents suggested that combining some required courses may be possible:

- In my opinion, the 527 Health Planning and 521 Organizational Dynamics could be combined. It would be nice to have a biology, disease studies or anatomy/physiology class, instead.

- Combining some of the courses that seem to repeat the same material such as health and society and community planning.

Regarding the veterinary public health concentration, two respondents shared the following:

- The VPH program is more oriented towards a general MPH rather than a VPH.
- Clarify the VPH program objectives and integrate more veterinary-specific courses in the focus curriculum.

Some respondents expressed frustration with faculty advising. Two respondents stated:

- I have spent a lot of money to be a part of this program; therefore, I should have a decent advisor.
- Meeting with faculty has become a nightmare to try to accomplish.

Other comments or recommendations addressed the following:

- More diversity (e.g., ethnicity, gender identity/sexual orientation) among students.
- Additional epidemiology/biostatistics courses to choose from and additional epidemiology professors.
- Selecting students that have core classes in statistics, economics, and community health.
- More variety of tougher Core Classes in the summertime if possible.
- More of a role for department student leadership in organizing events.

## **Summary**

The anonymous MPH student survey sought information from 50 currently enrolled students in March 2014. The overall response rate for the survey was 43 of 50, or 86%. The distribution of respondents by MPH concentration was over 80% for all concentrations. Respondents were asked 13 items about satisfaction with their experience in the MPH program and two items about level of challenge offered by core courses and concentration courses. Analyses were based on the three concentrations, as well as combined responses.

Overall, respondents were “satisfied” with their experience in the MPH program. The total mean satisfaction was highest for field practice and career planning items - adequacy of guidance in preparing for field practice and effectiveness of career planning with faculty/field coordinator – with means of 4.35 and 4.28 respectively. This was followed by faculty items - faculty show respect for students and faculty encourage active student involvement in learning - with means of 4.19 and 4.02 respectively. For the 13 items overall, the level of satisfaction was close to “more than satisfied,” with a mean nearing 3.9. Satisfaction levels based on concentration revealed the respondents from all three concentrations were mostly “satisfied” or “more than satisfied” with their experience in the MPH program, with total means of 3.79 for CHE, 3.74 for HPM, and 4.18 for VPH.

One open-ended question was asked regarding recommendations for improving the MPH program. The overall response rate for comments was 58.1%. Approximately 21 recommendations for improvement were provided, which are briefly highlighted above. Comments ranged from suggestions for combining courses to concerns over faculty instruction and advising.

Since the overall response rate to the online survey was high at 86%, it is assumed that the respondent data can be generalized to all current students and can be utilized to guide faculty and the MPH Academic Program Committee in improving the program. The demographic characteristics of the respondents are similar to characteristics found for all students in the MPH program. By keeping the survey completely anonymous, the MPH program director and student 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. Although comments in response to the open-ended question provide important insights regarding individual student perspectives of the program, the responses were limited in number and may not provide a generalizable perspective.

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