

Master of Public Health Student Survey (2016)

The University of Tennessee

An anonymous electronic survey of MPH students was completed in March 2016. 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.

Survey Instrument

The on-line survey was created in Qualtrics. Questions were designed by the Academic Program Committee so the student rates satisfaction on a five-point Likert scale. 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 mid-march through May, 2016. An initial email was sent providing the survey link. Seven days later, a second email was sent with a reminder to complete the survey. Due to the initial low response, faculty were asked to encourage students to complete the survey. The announcement with the link was included in the MPH Memos and a third email was sent.

All currently enrolled students received the survey. There were 59 students who opened the survey, 49 (84%) students completed at least 50% of the survey, 44 (75%) students completed it, and 16% abandoned the survey before responding to any questions. Those who completed the survey took approximately eight minutes to complete it. Data was analyzed using Qualtrics analytics and Excel.

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
CHE	26	53.1
HPM	16	32.7
VPH	7	14.3
Total	49	100.0

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	41	83.7
Part-time	8	16.3
Total	49	100.0

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 40 and 49 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.

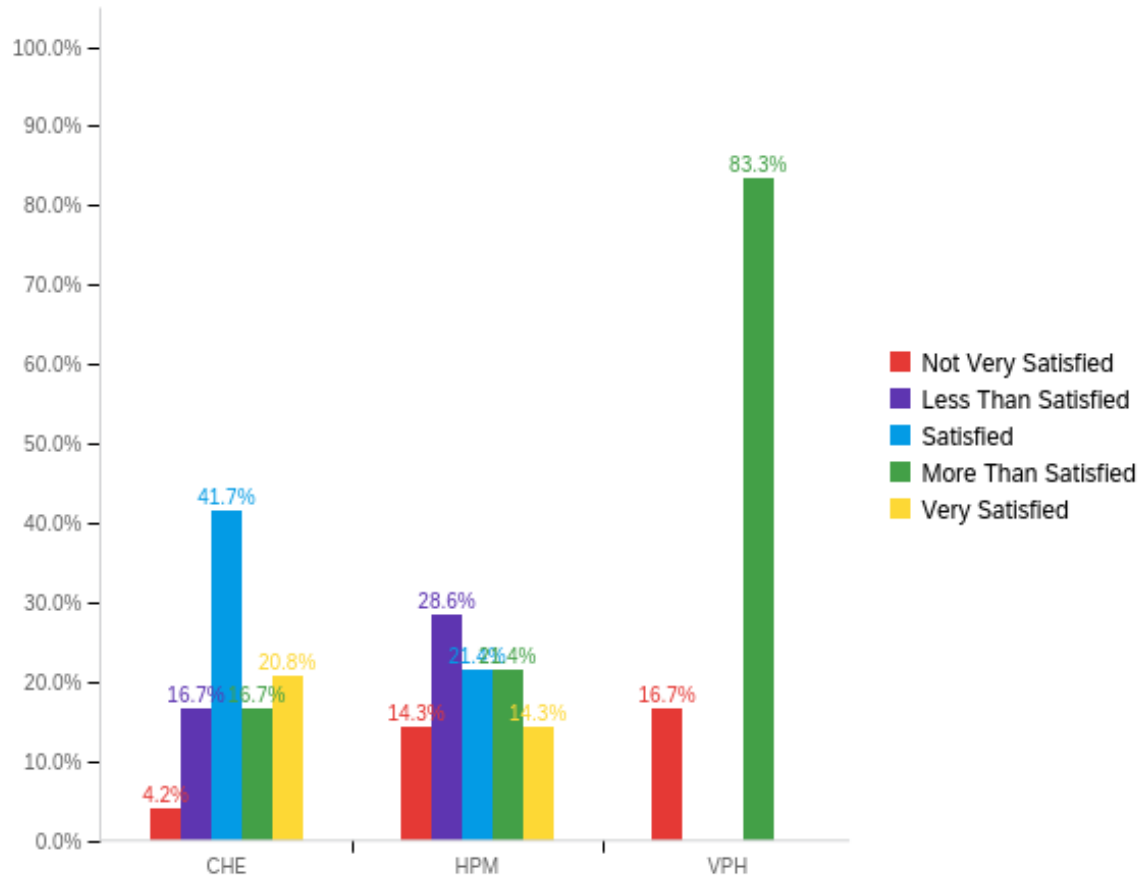
Table 4. Satisfaction with Experience as a Student in the MPH Program
(n = 49 for 2016 satisfaction unless otherwise noted)

Experience as a Student	Mean Satisfaction					
	CHE (26)	HPM (16)	VPH (7)	2016	2015	2014
Guidance on field practice	2.76	3.46	3.83	3.15 (n = 40)	3.31	4.35
Effectiveness of career planning	2.95	3.64	3.80	3.28 (n = 36)	3.28	4.28
Faculty show respect for students	3.73	3.81	3.86	3.78	3.89	4.19
Faculty encourage active student involvement in learning	3.69	3.63	3.86	3.69	3.86	4.02
Information obtained via MPH listserv	3.42	4.06	2.57	3.51	3.82	3.88
Communications with faculty	3.69	3.63	3.71	3.67	3.77	3.86
Opportunity to provide input (e.g. through opportunity to be a student representative to the Academic Program Committee)	3.38	3.38	3.00	3.33	3.57	3.77
Opportunity to participate with Public Health Graduate Student Association (PHGSA)	3.65	3.94	2.71	3.61	3.73	3.77
Quality of faculty advising	3.46	4.19	4.00	3.78	3.75	3.72
Information obtained via MPH Memos newsletter	3.15	3.81	2.57	3.29	3.27	3.72
Overall level of satisfaction with the MPH program	3.33	2.93	3.50	3.23 (n = 44)	3.61	3.67
Courses are relevant for professional growth and development	3.25	2.93	3.17	3.14 (n = 44)	3.41	3.44
Courses offer learning activities and experiences designed to expand professional competencies	3.20	3.10	3.10	3.15 (n = 47)	3.52	3.42
<i>Total Average Satisfaction</i>	<i>3.36</i>	<i>3.58</i>	<i>3.36</i>	<i>3.43</i>	<i>3.60</i>	<i>3.86</i>

While the 2016 survey reflects a decline in satisfaction for the MPH Program in 12 of the 13 items, students were “satisfied” with their experience as a student in the MPH Program. In contrast, satisfaction with the “quality of faculty advising” rose slightly, albeit with variation across concentrations.

HPM students indicated the highest level of overall satisfaction with their experience but it differed only marginally from the CHE or VPH students.

Figure 1. Overall satisfaction with the MPH Program by concentration.



The survey also sought information about overall satisfaction with the MPH program. Each concentration included a degree of dissatisfaction with the MPH Program.

Overall Satisfaction with the MPH Courses

The survey sought information related to level of challenge offered by both core and concentration courses. Overall, the majority of respondents (87%) 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; 92% CHE, 82% HPM, and 86% VPH. However, 4% of the CHE, 13% HPM and 14% VPH respondents indicated that the core courses offer somewhat less challenge than needed for professional preparation. Four percent of CHE indicated that the core courses were far less challenging than needed for professional preparation.

Overall, the majority of respondents (68%) indicated that the concentration courses that they had taken offer an appropriate graduate-level challenge needed for professional preparation. Ten percent indicated somewhat more challenge than 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; 72% CHE, 53% HPM, and 86% VPH. Sixteen percent CHE and 7% HPM indicated courses were somewhat more challenge than needed for professional preparation. However, 12% CHE, 20% HPM and 14 % VPH indicated that the concentration courses were somewhat less challenging than needed. Twenty percent HPM indicated concentration courses offered far less challenge than needed for professional preparation. A majority of respondents (95%) indicated satisfied that courses were relevant for professional growth and development. Twenty-six percent were either more than satisfied or very satisfied and 20% indicated less than satisfied or not very satisfied.

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:

- There is no structure and activities/assignments in CHE courses change abruptly . How can professors facilitate learning if their always changing the syllabi mid-course. I feel like I can't get my footing because I am always standing on shaky ground. Everything is up in the air, in flux. I like courses that have room for flexibility. We shouldn't be stringent in course planning, but there should be some structure.
- Every course needs to have a textbook. Offer more Master's level research opportunities. It seems like only a select few are gaining these opportunities and then the others are getting left behind. Also, courses seem to be tailored to professor interest rather than what is in the best interest of the course or students.
- The faculty lacked professionalism in the classroom and neither followed the syllabus. The Health Policy course did not cover a significant portion of the syllabus so I am concerned that material pertinent to my concentration is missing
- During my time in the graduate program staff turnover has been incredibly high. Certain professors, who are no longer with the program, did not provide adequate training and seemed to "care less" about the quality of education provided. Now, at the end of my pursuit of my MPH degree, I feel like some courses (521, 527, & 530) were a waste of time and money.

An interest in more research opportunities was expressed.

- There should be more independent research opportunities available for students who were not offered Public Health GA positions. Try to offer a wider variety of service learning project topics; not everyone wants to work with youth in the future. Help students make

connections between course assignments and professional development. Specifically for the Program Theory, Planning, and Implementation course, I recommend public health theories are taught in a separate course. I believe theory should be explained in more depth and given more application-based assignments. That course could include critiquing theories to determine which best reflect a program's goals and objectives. Program implementation and planning course could focus more on the developing of curriculum and strategies for delivery of information to educate populations.

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:

- It was difficult to jump straight into 555 without any other Public Health classes and little outside knowledge- perhaps it needs a pre-requisite for VPH students. Or if it could be offered more often, I could've taken a different class first.
- I feel that veterinary students should have a completely different curriculum because the majority of classes I was required to take were not very relevant or beneficial to me regarding my future career plans.

There were requests for advising and career guidance.

- Providing more decisive advising for students so there is more direction and less confusion. Providing better advising for field practice assignment would be appreciated as I felt that advising was lacking and under-developed.
- I would recommend MPH program to provide more resources for job search such conducting job fair for each concentration (CHE, HPM, & VPH) ; strengthening alumni links with current students to get a foot in door in their respective organization; conducting more networking sessions; and assistance from peers in public health in tailoring cover letter and resume towards the desired job. In addition, encourage students to select electives in courses such as ArcGIS, SQL, Statistical programs (SAS, R, & STATA), and Microsoft tools (MS Access, MS Excel).
- More career guidance for life after the program.

Summary

The anonymous MPH student survey sought information from 59 currently enrolled students in March 2016. The overall response rate for the survey was 49 of 59, or 84%. 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. However, several areas of dissatisfaction were identified.

One open-ended question was asked regarding recommendations for improving the MPH program. Twenty--eight recommendations for improvement were provided, which are briefly highlighted above. Comments ranged from suggestions for combining courses to concerns over faculty instruction and advising. Results, recommendations and comments were shared with the Academic Program Committee and the full faculty.

By keeping the survey completely anonymous, the MPH program 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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