MPH Comprehensive Examination Policies and Procedures

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Introduction

The University of Illinois at Springfield (UIS) Master of Public Health (MPH) curriculum emphasizes systematic instruction (didactics) and supervised practical applications of previously studied theory (internship). Students must demonstrate proficiency in the didactic lectures and specified competencies before they advance to candidacy for the MPH degree. The comprehensive examination is part of the closure experience of the MPH program, and it represents an assessment of student preparedness or competency in the core disciplines of public health and comprehension of key challenges in the areas of emphasis currently offered within the MPH degree.

All MPH students take a comprehensive written examination based on a case study with questions designed to test students' ability to integrate the knowledge and skills they have gained from the degree curriculum. The comprehensive exam is offered twice a year, during the fall and spring semesters. A student takes the public health comprehensive exam during his/her last semester of study. If the last semester falls during the summer, a student may petition to take the comprehensive exam during the prior spring semester.

All textbook chapters and assigned reading materials among all courses can be tested in the comprehensive exam.

Eligibility

To be eligible for the MPH Comprehensive Exam (MPH Degree Closure Exam), students must meet all the following criteria:

- You are expected to take the comprehensive exam during your final semester of coursework.
- You must complete all core courses (except the internship) and major-specific core courses prior to taking the comprehensive exam, but may take the exam concurrently with electives or the internship (MPH 581) during the last semester of study. (Source: UIS Catalog)
- Your advisor has confirmed that you met all the conditions for the comprehensive examination

When students need to take the comprehensive exam to graduate, the students must complete the Comprehensive Exam Eligibility Survey before the end of Week 3 of each semester except the summer semester.

Pass/Fail Exam

The student must complete and pass the exam within one year after completing course work for the degree. Students who do not successfully complete the examination during their final semester of study must enroll in MPH 583 (zero credit hours, one billable credit hour) each regular semester (fall/spring) until they pass the exam within the one-year limit.

Students are strongly encouraged to plan their course of study in a manner that allows sufficient time to dedicate to the assimilation of course contents and to reflect on the integrative aspects of public health practice before sitting for the comprehensive examination. Passing the comprehensive examination is a prerequisite to the completion of the MPH degree.

Format Guidelines for Exam Paper

Length
- The content of the comprehensive exam paper should be a minimum of 15 pages and a maximum of 30 pages in length. Page length does not include a cover page, executive summary, appendices, or reference list. Total pages should approximately fall in between 20-40 pages (including references, appendices, etc.). The following format should be applied to the paper.

General Formatting
- Double-Space lines
- Indent paragraphs (no space between paragraphs)
- Header on each page should include last name and date
- Footer on each page should include page number
- Times New Roman, 12-point font
- One (1") inch margins on all sides
- Written and saved in Microsoft Word, any version.

Answering Questions
- It would be very useful to acquire the latest version of the American Psychological Association's Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association. To avoid being overwhelmed, it may be helpful to write in sections instead of taking on the task of writing the exam within one sitting.

When you answer questions:
- Answer each question individually
- Provide your answer directly underneath the question you are answering
- Type the question (along with the question number) to be answered
- Label your answer with the question number while providing the answer underneath the question
- Please click an image below to view at full size.

Cover Page Requirements:

Comprehensive Examination

Submitted to the
MPH Program
University of Illinois at Springfield

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Master of Public Health

Submitted by

[Full Name]

[Date]

Writing Format Requirements:

Use 12pt Times New Roman, double-spaced, 1-inch margins all around

Header on each page should include last name and date

Label your answer with the question number (e.g. Ai.) while providing the answer underneath the question

Type the question (along with the question number) to be answered (e.g. Qi.)

Indent paragraphs (no space between paragraphs)

Submit in Microsoft Word (any version)

Footer on each page should include page number

[Last Name]   [Date]

[Section Name]

Qi: [Type the question (along with the question number) to be answered (e.g. Qi.)]
Ai:

    [Text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text]

Qii: [Type the question (along with the question number) to be answered (e.g. Qii.)]
Aii:

    [Text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text text]

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Citations-APA Style
The entire exam should be written in APA (American Psychological Association) style. Include a reference list at the end to cite all sources of information collected. Sources from Wikipedia, blogs and other non-peer-reviewed sites are not allowed. Citations within the text and the reference list should all be in APA style (American Psychological Association).

The APA Style website is a good source of information on using APA style properly. UIS Brookens Library also has great resources for the APA style: Go to Brooken's home page's "Research Guides"→"BY TYPE"→ "General Purpose" → "Citation Guides and Style Manuals".

Webinar - A Step-By-Step Guide for APA Style Student Papers (Provided by American Psychological Association)

Due Date
Comprehensive exam papers are due by Sunday – check schedule - (by 11:59 pm central time).

Submission Requirement - Turnitin
Submitting Your Comprehensive Exam
- Papers must be submitted through the designed link available for originality check on Canvas.
- Turnitin originality reports will be available to review prior to final submission.
- Papers may be submitted multiple times up until the final submittal to provide opportunities to review same reports faculty will use to assess the academic integrity of the paper
- For more information regarding the reports, visit the Turnitin website

Caution: Required File Name of Your Submission
When attaching your paper for final submission, all papers must conform to the following naming template for naming the file attached: lastname.firstname.semesteryear (Harry.Potter.Fall2023).

Turnitin has been set up for student access to the reports. You may submit your paper multiple times up until the final submittal, which will allow you to review the reports we will use to assess the academic integrity of the paper. We encourage you to use this Turnitin feature to minimize inappropriate use of the material of others and avoid plagiarism and cheating.

Accessing the Similarity Report
1. Select the relevant assignment.
2. To the right-hand side of your assignment, hit "Submission Details."
3. To view your Similarity Report in Turnitin Feedback Studio, click the similarity percentage (in the example, this is a red 41%).

Academic Integrity and Grading
UIS Academic Integrity Policy
The MPH program supports the UIS policy on Academic Integrity, which states, in part:

"*Academic integrity is at the heart of the university's commitment to academic excellence. The UIS community strives to communicate and support clear standards of integrity, so that undergraduate and graduate students can internalize those standards and carry them forward in their personal and professional lives. Living a life with integrity prepares students to assume leadership roles in their communities as well as in their chosen profession. Alumni can be proud of their education and the larger society will benefit from the University's contribution to the development of ethical leaders. Violations of academic integrity demean the violator, degrade the learning process,*

deflate the meaning of grades, discredit the accomplishments of past and present students, and tarnish the reputation of the university for all its members."

Academic sanctions range from a warning to expulsion from the university, depending on the severity of your violation and your history of violations. Whatever the sanction, the MPH program will file a report of academic dishonesty to the Office of the Provost.

You are responsible for understanding and complying with the UIS Academic Integrity Policy available at http://www.uis.edu/academicintegrity.

Grading Scale

There are six categories of performance. Your total points will be aggregated and standardized using a scale of 100%. To demonstrate competency, students must score 70% or above in all aspects of the comprehensive examination.

Overall grading strategy is presented below in Table 1. The different sections of the exam are where you demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the course materials. The different levels of attainment correspond to one's ability to transfer what one has learned to decision making and problem solving. You must defend your solutions given internal evidence and external criteria.

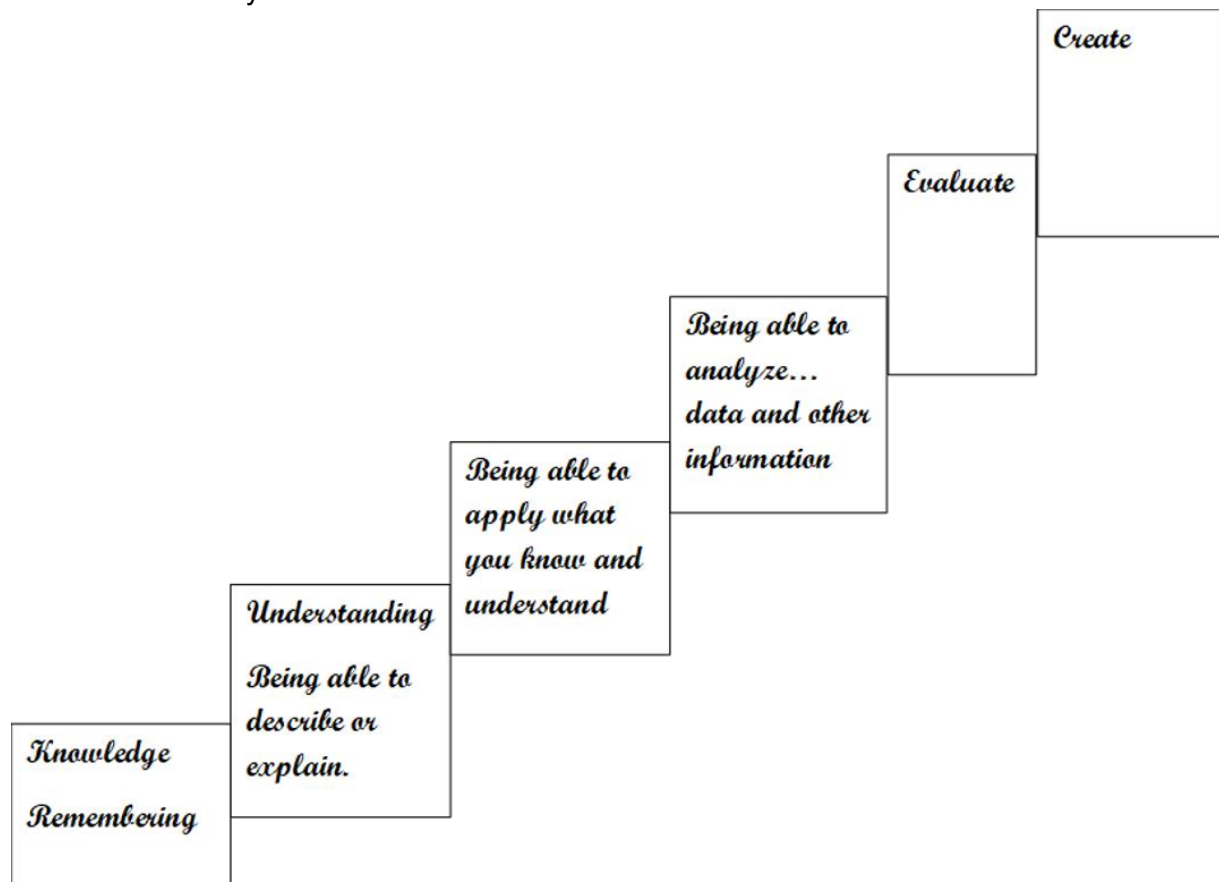Table 1: Grading Scale for Performance in the Comprehensive Examination

Proficiency Levels	Scores	Interpretation
Exceeds Expectations (highly proficient)	10	Evaluating problems and creating feasible unique solutions, based on internal evidence and external criteria. You can measure, criticize, evaluate, support/justify your ideas and/or course of action with evidence, and you can create new solutions.
Exceeds Expectations (very proficient)	8	Analyze the situation and break down components. You can subdivide, organize, break down, outline, plan, devise, deduce, and evaluate.
Meets Expectations (proficient)	6	Applying what you have learned from your classes. You can solve, modify, construct, articulate, determine, and judge.
Below Expectations (partially proficient)	4	You demonstrate understanding of the problem. You can explain, paraphrase, cite others, compare, and contrast.
Below Expectations (marginally proficient)	2	You have provided evidence that you have some specialized knowledge. You can define, describe, list, recognize and examine.
Question not addressed (not proficient)	0	You have FAILED to provide evidence that you have some specialized knowledge. You can define, describe, list, recognize and examine.

Understanding Bloom's Taxonomy

Bloom's Taxonomy describes types of learning. It is best represented as the figure where the foundation of learning is shown at the bottom, with increasingly more complex types of learning as you move upward.

MPH courses require more complex levels of learning, such as applying what you know to solve a problem or evaluate a public health program, analyzing something to understand how it works, or creating something new. It is important for you to show at the highest level at which you will be expected to demonstrate MPH competency in the comprehensive exam.

Bloom's Taxonomy Revised

Create

Evaluate

Being able to analyze... data and other information

Being able to apply what you know and understand

Understanding
Being able to describe or explain.

Knowledge
Remembering

Active Study Tools

Active learning always leads to effective learning outcomes. Do your best to avoid passive learning—you just absorb what you were told, memorize it, and spit it back out at exam time. You'll need to be an active learner to maximize the application of your knowledge and skills. Here is a great video to demonstrate some active learning tools:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_tgffn1k2dY

References

- Bloom, B. S., & Krathwohl, D. R. (1956). Taxonomy of educational objectives: The classification of educational goals by a committee of college and university examiners. Handbook I: Cognitive Domain. New York: Longman, Green.
- [Bloom's Taxonomy](#)
- [Action Words for Bloom's Taxonomy](#)

Foundation for the Comprehensive Examination

The comprehensive exam requires a public health response to a case study. In writing your response (i.e., paper), please consider the multiple purposes of the comprehensive exam. As a closure evaluation tool, the exam is designed to assess your ability to understand and apply the core functions of public health: assessment, assurance, and policy development.

In addition, it will be used to assess your ability to appropriately use the professional terminology of the field and apply appropriate theoretical perspectives. There is not a single right way or wrong way to answer the exam; rather, your success will be determined by producing a well-written paper that is complete, well justified, and draws upon the concepts covered in the MPH courses.

Your individual elective courses may lend extra depth to your answer. You must demonstrate your ability to apply what you have learned in the MPH curriculum to solve public health problems.

Please be aware that exam questions and requirements vary every time. All textbook chapters and assigned reading materials among all courses can be tested in the comprehensive exam. Your paper should demonstrate synthesis of CEPH Foundational Competencies and Concentration Comptetencies.

CEPH Foundational Competencies

Evidence-based Approaches to Public Health
1. Apply epidemiological methods to settings and situations in public health practice
2. Select quantitative and qualitative data collection methods appropriate for a given public health context
3. Analyze quantitative and qualitative data using biostatistics, informatics, computer-based programming and software, as appropriate
4. Interpret results of data analysis for public health research, policy, or practice

Public Health & Health Care Systems
5. Compare the organization, structure, and function of health care, public health, and regulatory systems across national and international settings
6. Discuss the means by which structural bias, social inequities, and racism undermine health and create challenges to achieving health equity at organizational, community and societal levels

Planning & Management to Promote Health

7. Assess population needs, assets and capacities that affect communities' health
8. Apply awareness of cultural values and practices to the design, implementation, or critique of public health policies or programs
9. Design a population-based policy, program, project or intervention
10. Explain basic principles and tools of budget and resource management
11. Select methods to evaluate public health programs

Policy in Public Health

12. Discuss the policy-making process, including the roles of ethics and evidence
13. Propose strategies to identify stakeholders and build coalitions and partnerships for influencing public health outcomes
14. Advocate for political, social or economic policies and programs that will improve health in diverse populations
15. Evaluate policies for their impact on public health and health equity

Leadership

16. Apply leadership and/or management principles to address a relevant issue
17. Apply negotiation and mediation skills to address organizational or community challenges

Communication

18. Select communication strategies for different audiences and sectors
19. Communicate audience-appropriate (i.e., non-academic, non-peer audience) public health content, both in writing and through oral presentation
20. Describe the importance of cultural competence in communicating public health content

Inter-professional Practice

21. Integrate perspectives from other sectors and/or professions to promote and advance population health

Systems Thinking

22. Apply a systems thinking tool to visually represent a public health issue in a format other than standard narrative

MPH-General

- MPH-G1. Analyze data to prioritize public health and social issues and make decisions through social determinants of health
- MPH-G2. Create a multilevel framework to generate social determinants of health intervention strategies for targeted populations
- MPH-G3. Integrate concepts and methods in social epidemiology to assess differences between population and individual health
- MPH-G4. Propose an epidemiologic study design to address a public health research question and critique the strengths and limitations

- MPH-G5. Design an impact evaluation plan on a health policy related to a public health program or practice

MPH-Environmental Health
- MPH-EH#1. Evaluate chemical, biological, and radiological sources of concern to human health and identify methods to reduce exposure
- MPH-EH#2. Integrate the principles of risk analysis and risk communication into communication strategies for diverse target audiences
- MPH-EH#3. Develop information materials (e.g., brochure of fact sheets, technical report) for risk communication based on a risk analysis
- MPH-EH#4. Construct components of an environmental risk assessment that meets established federal guidelines
- MPH-EH#5. Assess an environmental risk through the lens of environmental justice and social determinants of health

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Fundamental Knowledge

Why do I take a comprehensive exam?
- UIS requires all graduate degree programs to evaluate students through a closure exercise for the purpose of assessing the ability of the students to comprehensively integrate and apply competencies of the curriculum. UIS has approved three closure options: thesis, project or creative/artistic work; comprehensive exam; and a capstone course. In addition, accreditation criteria require academic programs have a culminating experience that includes a significant written product for the purpose of assessing students' abilities to integrate the public health curriculum for practicing the core functions of public health: assessment, policy development, and assurance. The MPH Program has selected the case-based comprehensive exam as the best match for assessing students in our degree programs.

What is the format of the comprehensive exam?
- The department uses a case-based comprehensive exam. A case scenario relevant to current public health issues/problems is developed as the foundation for all questions of the exam. All students taking the exam in a given semester will have the same case scenario, similar questions, and concentration-specific questions, as well as joint degree specific questions. Students analyze the data and science important to the issue; evaluate psychosocial and other demographic interactions and infrastructure important for intervention, and propose policy, programs, and outcome assessment for improving the public health of a community.

How long do I have to take the comprehensive exam?
- The exam opens on a predetermined Friday at 6 am (central time zone) and closes in 10 days on Sunday at 11:59 pm (central time zone).

Where do I go to get ready for the comprehensive exam?

- The department has created a Canvas course for delivering the orientation material for the exam, asking questions in preparation for the exam, and delivering the comprehensive exam itself and through which you will submit your paper.

Exam Preparation

How should I study/prepare for the exam?

- To start preparing for the exam, it would be helpful to examine the syllabus for each course. Then, review all public health related competencies. Collect the materials you feel will be helpful (textbooks, notes) from all your courses. You don't want to be scrambling for materials that you thought you had when you are writing the exam. Since the exam must be completed in APA style, familiarize yourself with APA style formatting. If you have mastered these materials, you should be well prepared to sit for the exam.

Can you tell me what kind of data we'll be getting for the statistical analysis? Is it raw data? Will I need SPSS/SAS or other statistical software?

- That would be letting the cat of the bag! However, now that I have your angst up, the answer is that you need to know what kind of data can be analyzed by which statistics and why. In addition, knowing how to interpret data analyses and the limitations to those interpretations would be critical. You also need to know the inherent bias that can occur and how types of analyses can give you misinformation. You can analyze the data using any statistical software of your choice.

What resources may I use in researching and writing my exam?

- You may use any sources except for other students or professionals in the field. Be sure to cite your sources.

Exam Paper Writing

What is the format and page length for my paper?

- Details for the format and page length of your paper are found on the Canvas for the comprehensive exam. Familiarize yourself with the details, as up to 5% of the points will be subtracted from papers that fail to follow the APA formatting, grammar, and page length quality.

I am a bit rusty on the APA format. Where can I find some resources?

- The following links to APA style guides are provided by the UIS Center for Academic Success Under their Writing Resources. The Learning Hub offers both on-campus and online assistance, and has many handouts to help you craft your paper:

  o Cornell University: A detailed website that gives APA examples for in-text citations and works cited pages. It covers a long list of different types of documents and electronic sources. This website can be used easily and efficiently.

- o   Rochester Institute of Technology: This [website](#) includes a thorough list of books, journals, and internet citations. It also includes a list of how to cite within the text. It addresses film and television but fails to give reference examples of other visual art forms (sculpture, painting, etc.).
- o   American Psychological Association: You might also find it useful to acquire the latest version of the American Psychological Association's Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association or [visit their website](#).

I am concerned about plagiarism. How can I check to make certain I am obeying the UIS Academic Integrity Policy?

- Your paper will be submitted through Turnitin for originality check. Turnitin is the originality checking and plagiarism prevention software used here at the UIS. MPH department uses this service with Canvas integration to have student work submitted to Turnitin's proprietary software that compares student work to a large database of digital content. The [Turnitin website](#) has more information regarding these reports.

Exam Grading

How will my paper be graded?

- The faculty of the department will read and grade the exam using the posted rubric based on how well the student has demonstrated each of the competencies for the curriculum. Scores on each competency will be based on criteria of Bloom's taxonomy, with higher-order integrative evaluative, and creative answers scoring the highest.

How firm is the content minimum and maximum? Will I be docked if I go over?

- Unless you are an extremely talented writer, it would be difficult to adequately address the exam questions and not meet the minimum page requirement. When the number of pages is excessive, it can be indicative of repetition, or a failure to understand what is being asked and therefore attempting to utilize the "kitchen sink" strategy. Therefore, whether you go over or under… it is probably an indication of the quality of the paper itself.

Will I receive feedback on my paper?

- Feedback is provided only for students failing the exam. These students will receive formative feedback from which to write a better exam on the second try. These students will also be encouraged to meet with individual faculty should they have questions about this feedback. Scoring and feedback from individual faculty reviewers will not be provided.