

UNIVERSITY OF WEST FLORIDA

School of Allied Health and Life Sciences

Master of Public Health Comprehensive Exam Guide

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About the Manual

This manual is a compilation of philosophy, policies, procedures and requirements of the MPH comprehensive exam experience. It is intended for use by students as they consider application to sit for the exam.

Although this manual contains the most pertinent information students will need, students should also be familiar with the School of Allied Health and Life Sciences curriculum policies. Faculty and staff of the program are readily available to students for guidance and are prepared to assist them in monitoring their progress toward achieving degree requirements. The School of Allied Health and Life Sciences reserves the right to add, delete, or modify all and any provisions in this manual.

Introduction and Purpose

The Comprehensive Exam is part of the culminating/capstone experience of the MPH program. The exam is designed to assess the student's level of mastery of the core competencies acquired in the MPH core courses*. Students will not be tested on isolated facts but will be given hypothetical situations that relate to their coursework in the MPH program and will be required to draw conclusions and make recommendations based on their knowledge of core theory in the discipline over which they are being tested. Following completion of the core courses students must take the Comprehensive Exam as a requirement for graduation.

*The core courses over which students will be tested include:

- **HSA5115** Public Health Care Policy and Administration
- **PHC5410** Social and Behavioral Sciences in Public Health
- **PHC 6000** Epidemiology for Public Health Professionals
- **PHC 6018** Survey of Environmental Problems
- **STA 5176** Biostatistics
- **PHC 6015** Epidemiological Study Design and Statistical Methods or **PHC 6196** Computer Applications in Public Health

The comprehensive examination is administered as a closed-book, type-written, proctored exam that is downloaded from UWF's eLearning system and submitted electronically back to this system. Internet-connectivity during the exam for downloading and submission is therefore required. The comprehensive exam is intended to be just as the word "comprehensive" is defined in the dictionary, "covering completely or broadly." Students should NOT give short answers to any questions. A student cannot display knowledge and understanding in a few short paragraphs, thus it is important that students answer every question completely and broadly. It is anticipated that each question could be answered adequately in no more than 3 double-spaced pages. The comprehensive examination requires broad preparation in the field of public health and includes questions requiring critical thinking employing knowledge from the core courses. Responses must demonstrate evidence of independent thinking, appropriate organization, critical analysis, and accuracy of documentation of the principles of the core domains of public health.

The comprehensive examination format detailed below is consistent with other Council on Education for Public Health accredited MPH degree programs in the United States. A record of the student's examination questions and responses will be maintained with the Master of Public Health program at UWF following graduation.

Registering for the Exam

Each student must submit a written request using the [Comprehensive Exam Registration Form](#) to the Director of the MPH program to take the exam. Students within UWF's geographic area (residence within 50 miles of UWF) must complete the exam requirements at UWF. Students outside of the 50 mile radius also have the option to complete the exam on-site at UWF if they choose. A student must be in good academic standing to sit for the Comprehensive Exam. Students must earn a grade of "C" or better in all courses in the MPH program in order to remain in good standing within the program and maintain an overall grade average of "B" in

order to remain in good standing within the program and in order to graduate from the program. All requests to take the Comprehensive Exam will receive a written or email response on the [Comprehensive Exam Scheduling Form](#), indicating the date, time and location for the exam. If the exam is conducted at a site outside the geographic area of UWF, the exam must be conducted in the presence of an approved proctor, with the additional submission of a [Proctor Approval Form](#) required before the exam can be scheduled. It is the responsibility of the student at a distant location to identify a proctor who meets the proctor requirements set forth on the [Proctor Approval Form](#).

Taking the Exam

The exam contains ten (10) questions from the core courses, broken into five (5) general areas. Students must choose 5 total questions (one from each area) and completely answer these questions. Extra credit will not be given for answering any additional questions beyond the first five (5) submitted for evaluation. Questions stress the integration of knowledge and skills that the student has acquired during the course of study in the MPH program. Students will be given four (4) hours to complete the exam. On the day of the exam, students will be given access to the exam in UWF's eLearning system in the presence of a proctor. Experience has shown that when students do poorly, it is either from not understanding the question at all, or more importantly not providing an adequate answer. The questions are written in such a manner as to allow a student great latitude in each answer. Students should not give irrelevant or unnecessary information in any answer, but instead show understanding of the topic by being thorough.

Sample Exam Questions

The following questions are a sample and will not be in the Comprehensive Exam. They are provided to students to assist in preparing for the actual MPH Comprehensive Exam.

EPIDEMIOLOGY FOR PUBLIC HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

Question 1: The local health department has enlisted your help as a health scientist consultant to help them develop a prevention program. The Director is particularly interested in controlling cigarette smoking among women aged 15-24. Describe one primary prevention approach and one secondary prevention approach you would use. Convey your understanding of the difference between primary and secondary approaches in the context of your answer.

Question 2: Nationally, your home state ranks 47th in incidence of preventable childhood injuries and your home state Department of Health has just received funding from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) to address the problem. You have been hired as an epidemiologist at the County Health Department and tasked with gathering baseline data for the project. The Director is discussing with the team whether to conduct a survey or establishing a surveillance system. What is your suggestion to the Director? Describe specific activities you would undertake to accomplish the goals of the option you propose (i.e. survey versus surveillance system). In your description, make sure to indicate your understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of either option.

Question 3: A program is to be developed to study the effects of alcohol consumption on health in a community in Northwest, Virginia. The study team in charge of the program is interested in a number of medical ends-points including coronary heart and liver disease, but the result must be obtained within the next year. Describe a suitable study design for this problem and give the reasons for your particular choice. Discuss the reasons that led you to reject other possible designs. You should consider the variables about which you would wish to collect data. In your answer you must demonstrate your understanding of the general disadvantages and disadvantages of your chosen study design.

SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES IN PUBLIC HEALTH

Question 1: Compare and contrast the Health Belief Model and Theory of Planned Behavior Reasoned Action. Use concrete illustrations to demonstrate your understanding of the application of the critical concepts and constructs of these theories as they relate to behavior change.

Question 2: Identify a major health problem in your community and explain how you would go about developing a health education strategy to deal with this problem. You must use one or more theories of behavior change to develop your strategy. Include in your answer one primary prevention strategy and one secondary strategy making sure to demonstrate in your answer the difference between the two.

Question 3: You have been assigned the task of reducing the incidence of HIV/AIDS in your community to achieve the Healthy People 2010 objective. Explain the steps you would follow to accomplish this task.

PUBLIC HEALTH CARE POLICY AND ADMINISTRATION

Question 1: The United States faces enormous challenges in health care and public health. The 2008 election season promises to be a very exciting election cycle and candidates from both parties have consistently touted public health policy as a major priority of their administration. Now suppose it is November 28 and the new president has been elected. You receive a call to be part of the president-elect health care transition team. The director of the transition team has asked you to put together a brief to set the public health priorities for the new administration on a major public health policy issue. The director identifies the following: controlling health care costs, eliminating racial and ethnic health disparities, expanding health promotion and disease prevention programs, improving women's health, improving mental health services for children and adolescents, introducing health care for all, and improving the quality of critical services in health care. Choose a candidate of your choice, and select one of the above issues. Write a policy brief and strategy that the new administration could use to advance this issue.

Question 2: It is often said that the United States health care system is a pluralist system, meaning that it is characterized by many stakeholders: insurers, payers, consumers, and the government. Explain the role of the federal, state, and local government and of the private sector in setting public health policy.

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SCIENCES

Question 1: A prominent environmental sciences researcher has just completed a study of the effects of pollution in your neighborhood. Some of the findings suggest high levels of outdoor pollution that have been linked to above average asthma and other respiratory problems among children and the elderly. Also, in the last five years local fishermen have also been complaining about low yields. This has been linked to diminishing populations of fish due to several reasons including dying species. Using a concrete example and integrating your knowledge of epidemiology and environmental health sciences, develop a public health intervention to address the problem, with additional integration of key elements of the "Clean Air Act" and the "Clean Water Act".

Question 2: Discuss Dose-Response theory and its role in the development of exposure limits to environmental pollutants in ground water.

Reading Lists

To prepare for the exam, please use the materials, resources, and textbooks used in the core courses.

Assessment of the Exam

Exams are graded by members of the Internship Coordination Committee (ICC) using a blind review process. All students are required to take and pass the Comprehensive Exam with a grade of 70% or better. Responses will be evaluated on the following criteria. Students should keep these points in mind when answering each question.

Purpose

The extent to which the response addresses the question

Subject matter knowledge

The appropriateness and quality of the supporting evidence

Depth and breath of understanding

The degree to which the responses demonstrates understanding of the topic

Responses must be communicated clearly enough to permit the professors who read the responses to make a valid judgment of a student's knowledge and critical thinking skills. Responses should be the original work of the student, written in the student's own words and not copied or paraphrased from some other work.

Procedures for Exam Failures

Students who fail the Comprehensive Exam in their first attempt will be allowed to take the exam a second time. For students who fail to pass the exam on their second attempt, the ICC will develop a remediation plan which will include a requirement that the student audit selected core courses prior to taking the exam a third time. Failure to pass the exam in a third attempt will result in dismissal from the MPH program.

Applicable Forms

Forms to meet the requirements for the Comprehensive Exam are available at the site:

<http://uwf.edu/sahls/masters-ph/forms/>

Required forms include:

Comprehensive Exam Registration Form

Comprehensive Exam Scheduling Form

Proctor Approval Form (for exams scheduled outside UWF's geographic area)