



# The Gillings MPH Core Frequently Asked Questions

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## 1. Why is the MPH Core curriculum changing now?

The world and employers' needs are changing. We are global and connected; tools and methods have evolved and continue to evolve rapidly. The ways we work have evolved, too. Now, we typically work in teams and across disciplines to solve complex problems affecting different populations and individuals.

At the Gillings School, we have experienced many drivers for change in our core training:

- **Student feedback.** We have listened to students. They would like core courses to be more integrated, applied and practice-based. They want to work with students from across public health disciplines and interact with other students in the Gillings School.
- **Stronger competition for MPH students.** We have seen a three-fold increase in the number of schools of public health in the past decade. Students have many new training options to choose from (e.g., distance learning, non-residential programs, part-time programs, and more).
- **Guidance from professional organizations.** At the national level, as part of its Framing the Future initiative, the Association for Schools and Programs of Public Health (ASPPH) undertook a comprehensive examination of public health education, including the BSPH, MPH and DrPH degrees, and recommended significant changes to all three degree program requirements, including core training.
- **New CEPH requirements.** In tandem with ASPPH recommendations, our accreditor, the Council on Education for Public Health, acknowledged these needs by issuing new required competencies for public health professional students, favoring more integrated, practice-oriented and team-based approaches to core training for MPH students.

The Gillings School has acknowledged these drivers and renewed our commitment to offering core public health training that will keep us the leading #1 public school of public health in the US.

## ***The New Gillings MPH Core***

## 2. How is the new MPH Core different from the current required original core training?

- **Original core training.** Master's students who matriculate in 2017 or earlier are required to take the 15-credit original core training that consists of five separate 3-credit courses offered by five different departments here at Gillings. Instructors plan and deliver each course on its own. Specifically, these five, 3-credit courses are Biostatistics (BIOS-600), Epidemiology (EPID-600), Environmental Health (ENVR 600), Health Behavior (HBEH 600) and Health Policy and Management (HPM 600).
- **New MPH Core.** This 12-credit, 2 semesters core training program replaces the 15-credit, 600-level course series for MPH students with:

- ▶ **Six credits in fall:** Understanding Public Health Issues (2 credits), Public Health Measurement and Methods (2 credits), and Analysis for Public Health (2 credits).
  - ▶ **Six credits in spring:** Strategies for Public Health Solutions (2 credits) and Methods for Designing and Implementing Public Health Solutions (4 credits).
- In addition, the new MPH Core includes **COMPASS (Core Online Modules to Promote and Accelerate Student Success)**. Students are invited to complete these seven online modules (~10 hours total), prior to the beginning of fall semester. The modules are designed to welcome and orient new students, and, to ensure that all students are prepared to succeed in the Core. Instructors in all courses work together, both within and across semesters, to ensure that students can integrate core materials and skills to address public health problems and implement solutions.

### 3. What will happen to the current 600-level courses?

We know that many students will need to continue to access the current 600-level courses, so we will continue to offer the 600-series until demand for these courses can be assessed.

### 4. When will the new MPH Core be rolled out?

The new Gillings MPH Core begins in fall 2018 for matriculating residential MPH and terminal MSPH students. We also plan to implement an online version of the new MPH Core at the same time (fall 2018) for students in the School's online program, MPH@UNC.

### 5. Who will take the MPH Core?

Beginning in Fall 2018, students entering the graduate professional public health degree programs (MPH and terminal MSPH programs) will take the new, integrated MPH Core and will have access to COMPASS (see above).

### 6. Is the Gillings MPH Core required or optional?

Students in the graduate professional public health degree programs (MPH and terminal MSPH programs) *must* take the new MPH Core. It is not optional. Students in *other* degree programs who must obtain core public health knowledge and skills will continue to take existing approved course options for their degree program.

### 7. Should MPH and terminal MSPH students take the new MPH Core in their first year?

Yes. Since the MPH Core provides foundational public health knowledge, students in the professional public health degree programs are strongly encouraged to take the integrated core in their first year. Exceptions will only be made on a case-by-case basis.

### 8. Who will teach in the new MPH Core?

An interdisciplinary teaching team will collaborate to integrate course content and teach both the Fall 6 credits and Spring 6 credits of the MPH Core. The integrated core will feature instructors from different departments, as well as Gillings alumni and other public health practitioners, who will bring real-world expertise to course material and activities.

### 9. Since the new MPH Core requires only 12 credit hours, will students get enough training to be successful?

We consider the new MPH Core to be “state-of-the-science” and to include the best teaching methods and pedagogical techniques. These 12 credits will lay a strong foundation that will prepare our MPH/MSPH students for interdisciplinary and

inter-professional work following completion of their degree programs. Along with completion of the 12 credits from the new MPH Core training, all students will take concentration-specific training (e.g. at least 30 total credits in a concentration area, such as Health Policy and Management, or Environmental Health Sciences), as well as an applied practice experience, and other learning opportunities. The new MPH Core is designed to meet or exceed all 2016 CEPH competency requirements.

#### **10. How will the new MPH Core prepare students for higher-level classes in each department?**

The new MPH Core provides foundational knowledge in public health that will prepare students to take concentration-specific training. Departments will review the foundational knowledge and competencies covered in the new MPH Core to determine whether and when/how students need any additional preparation before moving on to advanced coursework in their selected concentration and other areas.

#### **11. What are the benefits of an integrated MPH Core?**

- **For students:** The new MPH Core will require students to understand and address public health issues in interdisciplinary teams, as they will likely do in the work world when they graduate. Each semester will include case studies, involve practitioners and alumni, and require students to apply skills to existing and emerging public health issues through integrative individual and team projects.
- **For the Gillings School:** In addition to providing students with a 21<sup>st</sup> century, state-of-the-art public health practitioner curriculum, the structure of the Core is such that we can be more responsive to competition for students and drivers for change that we face going forward.

#### **12. How many students will be enrolled in the residential MPH Core?**

Initially, we expect approximately 250 students to be enrolled in the residential MPH Core. There will be approximately 125 students in each residential large group class. On Fridays, case study, lab and skills development sessions will feature activities and sessions with smaller groups, estimated at 15-20 per group.

#### **13. What do the Core course schedules look like?**

We have several descriptive handouts of the MPH Core and its schedule. We will make those available to key stakeholders soon, on the Gillings website – please stay tuned for more information.

#### **14. Are the syllabi available for viewing?**

Faculty instructors are developing the syllabi now and they will be available in September 2017. For now, we can share a list and illustration of the foundational knowledge and competencies that are included in each course within the 12-credit MPH Core (see information packet).

#### **15. Can students still graduate in two years if they take the new MPH Core?**

Yes. MPH foundational requirements will actually drop from 15 credit hours (now) to 12 credits hours in the new Gillings MPH Core.

**16. Can students take electives with the new MPH Core?**

Yes. Both fall and spring courses are 6 credits each. We fully expect students to take other concentration-specific required courses and/or electives in addition to the 6 credits each semester.

**17. Will the new MPH Core courses be offered online?**

We are expanding our online offerings through MPH@UNC, with the new MPH Core as the foundation for several MPH concentrations. Tuition and fees for MPH@UNC will be different, so we are still working out the policies and procedures regarding how these online courses may be made available to residential students.

**18. Can part-time students take the MPH Core?**

Yes. We anticipate that part-time students enrolled in an MPH or MSPH program at Gillings will be able to take the new MPH Core as long as they sign up for 6 credits per semester.

## ***Gillings COMPASS***

**19. What do we mean by “COMPASS”?**

COMPASS refers to “Core Online Modules to Promote and Accelerate Student Success” and is a series of brief, self-paced online modules developed to facilitate student success at Gillings. COMPASS modules will be open for students throughout the summer prior to their first academic year, and students can complete any and all parts of the COMPASS up to and including the first week of classes. Each module is self-paced and designed to be completed in a short amount of time (30 to 120 minutes each). The modules will include: Welcome to Gillings!; Resources; Ethics and Justice; Introduction to Library Resources and Writing; Honor Code and Plagiarism; Quantitative Analysis; and Leadership and Teamwork.

**20. How long will it take to complete the modules in COMPASS?**

It should take no more than 10 hours to complete all COMPASS modules.

**21. Is COMPASS mandatory?**

Yes. All MPH and terminal MSPH students will be required to participate in COMPASS.

**22. Will students be charged or earn credit for participating in COMPASS?**

No.

**23. Will students need to come to Chapel Hill before fall semester opens to complete COMPASS?**

No. Students enrolled in the MPH Core will not be required to come to UNC’s campus prior to the start of the fall semester to complete COMPASS. Students complete COMPASS online. We see COMPASS as a unique feature of the new MPH Core and hope that students will find that it is extremely helpful and fun, COMPASS self-paced modules will be an opportunity to get a great start to the fall semester.

**24. Will students be required to complete the COMPASS before fall semester begins?**

Not necessarily. We encourage students to get started on COMPASS as early as possible; however, we understand that some students may have other obligations before they begin

their studies at Gillings. Because several COMPASS activities and assignments early in the semester incorporate concepts first introduced in COMPASS modules, we ask students to complete COMPASS by the end of Week 1 of fall semester.

#### **25. Will students be graded on COMPASS assignments?**

No. However, content in COMPASS is critical for students to review, especially:

- **Two Check-Ups** – one for quantitative methods and one for writing – these self-assessments can help students understand whether they need additional resources to succeed in the MPH Core. Core course facilitators will help match/connect students with those resources (e.g. getting help with online resources or tutoring in quantitative methods or help with writing).
- **Points** -- Several assignments in the fall MPH Core courses incorporate concepts first introduced in COMPASS modules; and some COMPASS activities will have points attached to them that are awarded as part of students' grades in their fall MPH Core course.

### ***Additional Considerations***

#### **26. Can students be exempt from the MPH Core?**

We do not expect students to receive exemptions for MPH Core courses because this integrated training is considered the foundation of public health practitioner training at the master's level. That said, in rare cases, we may consider exceptions based on demonstrated mastery of the information, plus demonstrated skills in the kind of integrated, inter-disciplinary work that is the focus on the new MPH Core training.

#### **27. Can students apply for an exemption from either of the two quantitative courses in fall semester of the MPH Core (i.e., PH Measures and Methods and/or Analysis for PH)?**

Students with prior overlapping coursework in Epidemiology and Biostatistics may apply for an exemption, specifically if they have demonstrated successful mastery of the course competencies (receiving at least a "B" grade) and recent (within the last three years) completion of a course with similar competencies. Exemption applications will need to be approved by the core instructor and associate dean for academic and student affairs.

#### **28. Will students with a BSPH be able to waive out of the new MPH Core?**

No, students with a BSPH cannot waive out of the new MPH Core. However, as described above, students with a BSPH or with significant quantitative training from UNC or another institution of higher education will be able to apply to exempt out of one, both or parts of quantitative courses in the new MPH Core (Public Health Measurement and Methods/Analysis for Public Health) if they can demonstrate that they have met required master's level competencies (see above).

#### **29. What happens if a student fails a course or has a medical or other unexpected withdrawal that puts him/her out of sequence?**

The MPH Core teaching team will enact a remediation plan for any student who is unable to complete the MPH Core in sequence in the first year of study. Remediation plans will be handled on a case-by-case basis and may involve additional coursework or online courses (depending upon availability). In some cases, students will be offered a remediation plan to allow them to continue in the sequence of the integrated core. Factors that will be considered include:

- Amount of coursework completed
- Quality of the work already completed
- Coursework and experience prior to enrolling at Gillings
- Student performance in other courses
- Potential for this student to be able to succeed

**30. Will the MPH Core be offered in the summer?**

Not at the present time. The residential MPH Core is designed to be taken sequentially, with 6 credits taken in the fall semester (three 2-credit courses, taken concurrently) followed by 6 credits taken in spring semester (two 4- and 2-credit courses, taken concurrently). We are continuing to explore other options for offering the MPH Core, but there are currently no plans to offer any of these courses over the summer.

**31. Will the Gillings SPH Academic Enrichment Program be adapted to support students taking the new MPH Core?**

Yes. We anticipate that the Academic Enrichment Program will continue to provide group tutoring for students who may benefit from extra academic assistance in the new MPH Core course requirements and competencies.