



UNC
SCHOOL OF
PUBLIC HEALTH

Online

BY ELIZABETH BLACK

LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES



PHOTO: (from left) Michele Dry, program registrar; Hollie Pavlica, program director; and Elisabeth Constandy, the 100th graduate of the Core Public Health Concepts Certificate Program, celebrate at the fall 2005 graduation ceremony.

**THE PROGRAM
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Core Public Health Concepts certificate offers students flexibility, perspective across five public health disciplines

The UNC School of Public Health's Certificate in Core Public Health Concepts, now in its sixth year, provides an opportunity for students anywhere in the world to complete a 12-credit program of study in public health without ever setting foot in a classroom.

That's because all the classes needed to earn the certificate are offered online.

Through the Internet, students are able to hear the same lectures, work on the same case studies, participate in the same individual and small-group learning experiences, and take the same exams as students who take these classes on the Carolina campus.

The curriculum consists of five courses: epidemiology, health policy and administration, health behavior/health education, biostatistics, and environmental health. It's based on key requirements specified by the Council on Education for Public Health, the independent agency that accredits schools of public health and graduate-level public health programs outside of schools of public health.

Designed for people who have worked three or more years in the field of public health without a formal degree or training in the field, the certificate program draws individuals from a variety of professions, including medicine, nursing, veterinary science, and journalism. Twenty-one percent of program participants are minorities.

"We have students from all 50 states, 12 countries and two U.S. territories, all representing a variety of professions, cultures and ethnic backgrounds," says Program Director Hollie Pavlica. "With this mix of disciplines and backgrounds, our students raise many different ideas in discussions and offer a wide breadth of perspectives."

Because they don't attend traditional classes, many students continue working full time jobs while earning certificates. This flexibility has helped increase the program's popularity. During the past five years, the number of students enrolled in the program has increased from 28 in 2000 to 276 in 2005. To date, 159 students have

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"The courses were interesting and challenging and professors were friendly and available to answer questions."

SHARON E. LOZA
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY CANDIDATE
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD, OXFORD, UK

earned certificates from the program.

When they earn the certificate, students are a third of the way toward completing the required courses for a master's degree in public health, and many choose to continue their studies.

"A lot of people come to us first because it means less time on campus away from full-time jobs," Pavlica said. "It gives them a chance to get their feet wet."

Students may take two courses at a time, although most take one course a semester. This pace allows students to balance work and family life while committing 10 to 12 hours a week to each course. At this pace, it takes a year and a half to complete the program.

Dr. Lorraine Alexander, clinical assistant professor in the School's Department of Epidemiology, has worked with the certificate program from its inception and co-teaches an epidemiology course for the program.

"Faculty work hard to keep online classes structured and well-organized so that students feel comfortable and can ask questions and receive significant feedback," Alexander said. "We don't want our online students to feel isolated."

Certificate graduates speak highly of the program.

Patrick Kelley, a May 2004 certificate graduate, said he knew the program would be hard work, but the online aspect helped him balance his time.

"School was easier to integrate into my life because I didn't have to drive to and from campus," he said.

Kelley, an international security analyst at Research Triangle Institute International, earned his certificate in three years. "I think I gained a base of solid public health knowledge across the five disciplines," Kelley said. "It's made me better at work."

The School of Public Health's reputation, especially in epidemiology, drew Kelley to the certificate program. Like many others, he began the certificate program with an eye toward eventually pursuing a master's degree in public health.

"When you go back to school in the middle of your life, you want to do it right," he said.

Many students in the program share Kelley's assessment.

"We have extremely happy and satisfied students," Pavlica said. "We think it's a great program."

For more information on the Certificate for Core Public Health Concepts program, visit www.sph.unc.edu/nciph/certificate/. ■



"The organization of the courses were well defined and permit individuals with active careers to pursue this certificate."

KEVIN P. MULVEY, PHD
CHIEF, PRACTICE ASSESSMENT AND APPLICATIONS BRANCH
CENTER FOR SUBSTANCE ABUSE PREVENTION
ROCKVILLE, MD



"Over the last two and a half years I have lived in six countries and accessed the blackboard learning system from at least ten different countries."

MOLLY JORDAN
PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT
MAPUTO, MOZAMBIQUE