

# **Examining Undergraduate Public Health Education as a Pipeline to the Public Health Workforce**

## **Author**

Studer, Melanie L.

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## **Abstract**

Undergraduate public health (UGPH) education in the U.S. has grown rapidly since the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and has been identified as potential strategy for strengthening the public health workforce. The objective of this research was to examine UGPH education as a pipeline to public health careers and identify the knowledge and skills graduates need to be well-prepared to enter the public health workforce.

First, we characterized the postbaccalaureate education and employment of public health bachelor's degree graduates from the UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health. For the sample of respondents in this study, UGPH education served as an effective pipeline to the broad and diverse public health workforce, with the majority of graduates pursuing additional education in public health and clinical fields and obtaining employment in diverse employment sectors and occupations where they are working to improve the public's health.

Next, we described the job tasks being performed by graduates doing public health and health-related work and the knowledge and skills graduates reported needing to perform these tasks, and more broadly, to be successful in their postbaccalaureate pursuits. The job tasks and knowledge and skills reported by the sample of respondents in this study provide preliminary insights into the core knowledge and skills graduates may need to be well-prepared to enter the public health workforce, such as communication skills, data analysis skills, professional experience and related skills such as project management, knowledge of the U.S. health system and health policy, and teamwork and collaboration skills.

Finally, we demonstrated a method that could be used by UGPH programs to collect post-graduate outcomes and alumni feedback on curricular effectiveness, described how programs could use this data to support program operations and continuous improvement, and offered lessons learned from the process.

In sum, this research begins to address existing knowledge gaps regarding the career paths of graduates of UGPH programs and offers programs potentially valuable insights and guidance. However, the findings from this study are not generalizable and more research is needed to develop a nationally representative understanding of the implications of the growth of UGPH education in the U.S.

## **Advisor**

Pink, George

Committee member

Hassmiller Lich, Kristen; Linnan, Laura; O'Keefe, Molly; Reiter, Kristin

University/institution

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Department

Health Policy and Management

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