

2.5 CULMINATING EXPERIENCE. ALL GRADUATE PROFESSIONAL DEGREE PROGRAMS, BOTH PROFESSIONAL PUBLIC HEALTH AND OTHER PROFESSIONAL DEGREE PROGRAMS, IDENTIFIED IN THE INSTRUCTIONAL MATRIX SHALL ASSURE THAT EACH STUDENT DEMONSTRATES SKILLS AND INTEGRATION OF KNOWLEDGE THROUGH A CULMINATING EXPERIENCE.

2.5.a. Identification of the culminating experience required for each professional public health and other professional degree program. If this is common across the school's professional degree programs, it need be described only once. If it varies by degree or program area, sufficient information must be provided to assess compliance by each.

Syllabi, rubrics, other culminating experience materials, and student sample work for each professional program are found in **ERF 2.5.a.: Culminating Experience Syllabi and Other Materials.**

MPH

All students earning a MPH must complete a two-credit culminating experience (or capstone). A culminating experience (CE) is one that requires a student to synthesize and integrate knowledge acquired in coursework and other learning experiences and to apply theory and principles in a situation that approximates some aspect of professional practice. It is through this culminating experience (CE) that faculty members evaluate students' mastery of the body of knowledge and proficiency in the required competencies for the MPH tracks.

The goal of the CE is for students to demonstrate knowledge and skills learned through their MPH coursework and practicum by applying the principles and methods of public health practice to a public health issue. The MPH program offers a variety of options for achieving this goal. Thus, while the MPH program requires a capstone experience, how this experience is delivered varies among our MPH tracks.

MPH@GW

Since the majority of our MPH students online are geographically removed from campus, we dedicated significant thought and discussion as to the best way to evaluate the effectiveness of the CE experience for these students. After a couple of iterations, we have developed the following plan. The assessment of student competency in the CE is achieved by requiring that students successfully complete a number of sequential steps in the process leading to the final culminating experience project. By structuring the CE course so that faculty serve as CE advisors (with a faculty student ratio of about 1:10), we are able to ensure that students receive intensive one-on-one mentoring and oversight from faculty with extensive experience in advising CE projects. Students are not allowed to proceed to a subsequent step of the CE process unless they have received approval (in the form of "credit" or "no credit") from the faculty advisor.

Dr. Kathleen Roche, Associate Professor in the Department of Prevention and Community Health, oversees the culminating experience for the MPH@GW program. The CE is a *two-term*, two-credit experience. Dr. Roche ensures consistency and coordination of the different CE sections by (1) selecting faculty especially well-suited to advise and mentor students on the CE, (2) communicating in person, by email, and by phone with faculty throughout the term, in order to answer faculty questions and discuss any specific CE issues that arise.

Common among all MPH tracks is that the CE/capstone is two credits, independent work is required, and a final product that involves synthesis of previous coursework. Departments decide independently whether the CE receives a letter grade versus credit/no credit. Research options include 1) data collection and analysis (applied research project); 2) secondary data collection and analysis; 3) policy analysis; 4) meta analyses; 5) literature review; or 6) white paper. Final work products may include a proposal and final report, memos, written testimony, concept papers and oral presentations.

MHA

The Program uses several criteria to ensure that students apply critical thinking, problem-solving and management knowledge, and skills in both didactic and operational settings. Residential students must choose between a residency or internship plus thesis option during their final year of the program. The residency or internship/thesis serves as the program CE.

Residency focus areas include either Acute and Ambulatory Care Management or Post-acute Care Management (including Long Term Care). Internship focus areas include Information Systems and Financial Management, Operations Management or Strategic Management and Policy.

The residency/internship experience enables students to apply their classroom experiences in healthcare operations and continue the transition from student to health services executive. The student is expected to continue their professional growth and development within each of the five domains and 31 competencies of the MHA Program. The residency/internship is directly coupled with the educational goal of, “preparing students for leadership roles in the field of health services management” and the objective of, “complementing didactic learning with a variety of formal and informal field experiences.” Students enroll in the residency only after all of the required and elective courses are completed. Students complete an internship typically enrolled during their final semester in the Program. In extraordinary circumstances, an internship can stretch over two semesters.

Executive MHA

The culminating experience in this program runs concurrently with the final three modules. Concurrent with Module Six students enroll in HSML 6272, a one-credit course entitled Organizational Research Project, Part 1. This course is designed to prepare the MHA@GW students to undertake the

organizational research project. By the end of this course students will have chosen between one of three options:

1. Organizational Research/Evaluation – this project asks the student to perform an applied research project in their organization or engage in the evaluation of a current clinical or administrative effort.
2. Business Plan – using the Small Business Administration (or similar) template, develop a comprehensive business plan for a new strategic service unit or expansion of an existing SSU
3. Literature Review – this project is targeted at solving a specific operational issue of importance to the student’s organization. The project will include a comprehensive review of the literature in order to uncover prior work in the particular area along with best practices.

During HSML 6273, a one-credit course that runs concurrent with Module Seven, students will be developing, refining and potentially, beginning to implement their formal project proposals, based on the approved prospectus crafted in HSML 6272. The objective of the project proposal is similar to that of a dissertation proposal where the student demonstrates the requisite level of background and familiarity with the chosen project.

The proposal is intended to be a document describing the specific elements of the final project and must be submitted prior to the end of week two. Students should use a grant/briefing format that includes (at a minimum): statement of purpose, goals, objectives, and detailed outline of the approach being proposed. The proposal is to be approximately four-to-six pages in length.

Working with the organizational preceptor, the student is asked to develop and present a mid-point “implementation defense” no later than the final week of the term. The presentation on the 2GW platform should be no more than 10 minutes in length and include PowerPoint slides. Once approved by the preceptor and faculty advisor, the student is permitted to complete work on their project, which is formally presented during the live Immersion Four session.

Module Eight of the executive MHA program is titled “Systems Thinking and Learning in Healthcare.” The intent of this four-credit module is to synthesize the content covered in the first seven modules into a coherent whole using the theme of organizational systems as the means by which MHA@GW students can help create and sustain organizational excellence. This module will examine hard and soft systems theory, complexity, resilience, innovation, change management, high reliability and multiple learning modalities as applied to high performing healthcare organizations. Students will be introduced to a panel of leading thinkers and practitioners in these domains who will provide critical advice throughout the module.

Finally, in the last immersion (1.5 credits), students will present the findings of their organizational research projects and leadership portfolios. Feedback on the research projects will be provided by peers and a panel of healthcare leaders.

DrPH

The dissertation is the culminating experience for the DrPH. Students must complete required coursework and pass the comprehensive exam to be officially admitted to the candidacy phase of the program. A Dissertation FAQ document has been created to assist candidates <http://publichealth.gwu.edu/services/students>, and examples of the comprehensive exams can also be found in **ERF 2.5.a**. In the candidacy phase, students take a two-credit dissertation proposal preparation course (PUBH 8422- *Advanced Health Care and Public Health Research Design*) prior to defending their dissertation proposals before their Dissertation Chair and Research Committee. Students must complete between six to nine credits of dissertation research (PUBH 8423) before they may become eligible to defend their dissertation before their Dissertation Research Committee and two external examiners.

It is the expectation that students will work independently, under the guidance of a Dissertation Research Committee, to prepare an oral and written dissertation demonstrating their ability to analyze and solve a complex public health practice-based problem. A candidate's interpretation of the research results is expected to make a substantive, original contribution to the field of public health research and practice.

DrPH students generally devote about 18-30 months to the candidacy phase of the program. This includes time spent developing the dissertation topic, research approach, dissertation proposal and defense, completion of research, interpretation and presentation of findings, and final dissertation defense. Students can choose to prepare a traditional (comprehensive report) dissertation or choose a three-paper option, where three peer-review quality papers are completed prior to the defense. Students work closely with their Dissertation Research Committees, and especially their Committee Chairs, throughout the candidacy phase.

2.5.b. Assessment of the extent to which this criterion is met and an analysis of the school's strengths, weaknesses and plans relating to this criterion.

This criterion is met.

Strengths:

- Many CEs are advanced work that follows from the practicum experience, enhancing the connection between the academic experience and public health practice at GW.
- The CE experience is rigorous.
- Drawing on our strength of being located in Washington, DC, students are taking advantage of a wide range of opportunities to complete CEs.
- Many of the CE projects are published in peer reviewed journals.
- All doctoral students are expected to publish their dissertation work, and those choosing the three-paper model have been successful in publishing much of their research.
- Increasingly sophisticated methodologies are being employed in CE data analyses by students.
- We have continued to provide students with projects relevant to their individual research interests.

Challenges:

- Ensuring a uniformly high quality CE product from all students.
- Providing adequate faculty advising for CEs as our enrolled MPH student population grows.
- While residencies are funded in the MHA, internships are not.

Future Plans:

- Ongoing review and modification of CE formats for the MPH programs.
- Building faculty to support CE advising for the MPH@GW program.