

B5. Alums' Perceptions of Curricular Effectiveness

For each degree offered, the school collects information on alums' perceptions of their preparation for the workforce (or for further education, if applicable). Data collection must elicit information on what skills are most useful and applicable in post-graduation destinations, areas in which graduates feel well prepared and areas in which they would have benefitted from more training or preparation.

The school defines qualitative and/or quantitative methods designed to provide useful information on the issues outlined above. "Useful information" refers to information that provides the unit with a reasonable basis for making curricular and related improvements. Qualitative methods may include focus groups, key informant interviews, etc.

The school documents and regularly examines its methodology, making revisions as necessary, to ensure useful data.

- 1) *Summarize the findings of alums' self-assessment of their preparation for post-graduation destinations.*

Every 2-3 years, GWSPH reaches out to recent alums to complete a brief Alum Survey and participate in an Alum Interview. The survey link is shared in emails to alums, at organized alum events, via social media and by word of mouth. At the end of the survey, alums sign up for an interview date with a member of the accreditation team. In recognition of working hours, interview appointments are available during the day, in the evenings and on weekends. Semi-structured interview questions for more recent graduates (≤ 3 years) and not-so-recent graduates (> 3 years) guide the conversation during these interviews. Interviews are summarized using a template and reviewed by the accreditation team to identify repeating themes and topics. Results are discussed at GWSPH Curriculum Committee and Executive Committee.

The most recent round of data collection began in September 2023 with an email to alums (N=4339; graduation year of 2023-2019). Later that fall, QR codes linked to the survey were distributed at the 2023 APHA Alumni and Friends event in Atlanta, Georgia. Data were collected through early January 2024. When the Alum Survey closed on January 1, 2024, 395 responses had been collected.²¹ Of the individuals who completed the survey, 109 signed up for an interview (28% response rate; N=76 showed). Taking into consideration the fact that the request to complete the Alum Survey was emailed to alums only once and alums who had signed up for an interview but did not show were only emailed one reminder to reschedule, the number of responses and completed interviews is impressive. Interestingly, the distributed QR codes during APHA did not elicit many survey responses or interview appointments, as expected. The limiting factor in soliciting additional responses was the accreditation team's interview capabilities. A large number of interview appointments were scheduled in the weeks following the initial request email. Most interviews were carried out by the Director of Academic Planning and Accreditation with assistance from three others.

²¹ Response rate is incalculable as it is not possible to count the number of individuals who saw the post on social media, were forwarded an email from a fellow alum, or were handed a QR code. Of the 395 responses collected, 38 only included information on their degrees and graduation year. These responses have been removed from the presented results. Values presented may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Completed Survey Respondents	BS	MPH	MS	MHA	DrPH	PhD	Total
Recent Graduates (2020 and later)	27	178	7	18	3	5	238
Not-So-Recent Graduates (2019 and earlier)	15	74	7	18	5	0	119

Additionally, all graduating students complete an exit survey (Graduation Survey; see [Criterion B4](#)) sent by GW Office of Survey Research and Analysis. The Graduation Survey is generally sent in anticipation of Commencement in May. Students must complete this survey in order to obtain tickets for the ceremony. Response rates were exceptionally low during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2021), as there was little incentive for students to complete the survey when there was no in-person Commencement Ceremony in the spring of 2021. Responses increased considerably in the following years.

Undergraduate

Results from the 2023 Alum Survey indicate that recent BS graduates (2020 and later) feel that their program prepared them very well or somewhat well for their post-graduation plans (100%, N=27). Based on their experiences in their programs, alums rated their abilities to apply the following skills using a five-point Likert scale including a "Not Applicable" option (which was not selected by any graduate indicating that all skills were applicable to all GWSPH graduates regardless of degree program or level).

Skills	Very Confident % (N)	Somewhat Confident % (N)	Somewhat Not Confident % (N)	Not Confident % (N)
Integrate the findings from qualitative and quantitative data into research, policy or applied practice settings.	52% (14)	41% (11)	4% (1)	4% (1)
Communicate public health information to a variety of audiences.	74% (20)	22% (6)	4% (1)	0% (0)
Apply knowledge of the social and biological determinants of health to a public health challenge.	74% (20)	26% (7)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Advance population health, well-being and social justice.	65% (17)	31% (8)	4% (1)	0% (0)
Work effectively on an interprofessional team.	74% (20)	22% (6)	4% (1)	0% (0)
Implement and manage a public health project.	56% (15)	30% (8)	11% (3)	4% (1)
Propose strategies to resolve public health challenges.	44% (12)	48% (13)	4% (1)	4% (1)
Approach public health research, policy and practice with cultural awareness.	63% (17)	33% (9)	4% (1)	0% (0)

Five qualitative interviews with recent undergraduate alums (2020 and later) from the BS in Public Health program were conducted between September 23, 2023, and January 4, 2024. Alums believe their programs directly impacted their current roles and positions. They mentioned such skills as writing, research methods, literature searches, data synthesis, teamwork, communicating complex information, data collection methodologies and the social determinants of health as strengths of their programs and crucial for their current roles. To improve the BS in Public Health program, alums suggested adding additional lessons on quantitative skills (including utilizing software) and adding complex issues earlier in the program. In particular, alums recommended that career development topics such as learning

about entry-level public health jobs, how to write résumés and more networking opportunities were needed.

Results from the 2023 Alum Survey indicate that not-so-recent BS graduates (2019 and earlier) feel that their program prepared them very well or somewhat well for their post-graduation plans (100%, N=15). Based on their experiences in their programs, alums rated their abilities to apply the following skills using a five-point Likert scale including a “Not Applicable” option (which was not selected by any graduate indicating that all skills were applicable to all GWSPH graduates regardless of degree program or level).

Skills	Very Confident % (N)	Somewhat Confident % (N)	Somewhat Not Confident % (N)	Not Confident % (N)
Integrate the findings from qualitative and quantitative data into research, policy or applied practice settings.	53% (8)	33% (5)	7% (1)	7% (1)
Communicate public health information to a variety of audiences.	67% (10)	33% (5)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Apply knowledge of the social and biological determinants of health to a public health challenge.	87% (13)	13% (2)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Advance population health, well-being and social justice.	67% (10)	20% (3)	13% (2)	0% (0)
Work effectively on an interprofessional team.	73% (11)	27% (4)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Implement and manage a public health project.	36% (5)	36% (5)	29% (4)	0% (0)
Propose strategies to resolve public health challenges.	50% (7)	43% (6)	7% (1)	0% (0)
Approach public health research, policy and practice with cultural awareness.	79% (11)	14% (2)	7% (1)	0% (0)

Two qualitative interviews were conducted with not-so-recent BS graduates (2019 and earlier) between September 23, 2023, and January 4, 2024. Both alums stated that their bachelor’s degree prepared them well for the public health workforce. One alum commended GWSPH’s policy focus and recommended adding additional content on social issues such as poverty and homelessness. The other alum recommended that data analysis using software like Excel and additional lessons on group projects be added to the curriculum.

On the Graduation Survey, undergraduate alums answer several five-point Likert scale questions regarding their perceptions on the effectiveness of the curricula, with lower values representing low perceptions and higher values representing high perceptions. Response rates in 2020–2021 were 8% and increased to 97% in 2021–2022 but decreased again in 2022–2023 to 80%.

Question	2020-2021 Average (N)	2021-2022 Average (N)	2022-2023 Average (N)
Overall, how would you rate the level of engagement in the courses you took in your major?	4.5 (12)	4.4 (150)	4.2 (150)
Overall, how would you rate the level of intellectual challenge in the courses you took in your major?	3.8 (12)	3.9 (150)	3.7 (150)

In 2021-2022, 90% (N = 144) of undergraduate alums were satisfied or very satisfied with the opportunities they had to apply their learning in real world situations (e.g., internship, service learning). In comparison, approximately two-thirds of alums (66%, N = 112) were satisfied or very satisfied with the opportunities to participate in research with a faculty member.

Graduate

Results from the 2023 Alum Survey indicate that most recent master’s and doctoral graduates (2020 and later) feel that their program prepared them very well or somewhat well for their post-graduation plans (94%, N=197). Based on their experiences in their programs, alums rated their abilities to apply the following skills using a five-point Likert scale including a “Not Applicable” option (which was not selected by any graduate indicating that all skills were applicable to all GWSPH graduates regardless of degree program or level).

Skills	Very Confident % (N)	Somewhat Confident % (N)	Somewhat Not Confident % (N)	Not Confident % (N)
Integrate the findings from qualitative and quantitative data into research, policy or applied practice settings.	54% (114)	37% (77)	8% (17)	1% (2)
Communicate public health information to a variety of audiences.	69% (144)	27% (57)	3% (7)	0% (0)
Apply knowledge of the social and biological determinants of health to a public health challenge.	69% (144)	30% (64)	1% (2)	0% (0)
Advance population health, well-being and social justice.	58% (119)	37% (76)	4% (8)	1% (3)
Work effectively on an interprofessional team.	84% (176)	14% (30)	2% (4)	0% (0)
Implement and manage a public health project.	53% (111)	40% (79)	6% (13)	5% (5)
Propose strategies to resolve public health challenges.	60% (126)	33% (70)	6% (12)	1% (2)
Approach public health research, policy and practice with cultural awareness.	64% (132)	32% (67)	3% (7)	<1% (1)

Between September 23, 2023, and January 4, 2024, the accreditation team interviewed 46 recent alums (2020 and later) from the school’s master’s programs, with the majority having earned an MPH. No recent doctoral alums were interviewed. Some reappearing themes include graduates’ appreciation for their faculty (their professionalism, expertise, empathy, mentorship), that the GWU name was recognized as providing a quality program and the school’s policy perspective. When asked how their programs could be improved, topics such as communicating public health information, quantitative analysis (including software skills) and practicum

assistance were mentioned multiple times. Another often-repeated suggestion was the addition of more networking opportunities for residential and online students and alums. Particularly among the distance-based graduates (non-DMV area) and working alums, it was important to be able to connect with other alums in their geographic areas in the evenings and on weekends.

Results from the 2023 Alum Survey indicate that most not-so-recent master’s and doctoral graduates (2019 and earlier) feel that their program prepared them very well or somewhat well for their post-graduation plans (94%, N=98). Based on their experiences in their programs, alums rated their abilities to apply the following skills using a five-point Likert scale including a “Not Applicable” option (which was not selected by any graduate indicating that all skills were applicable to all GWSPH graduates regardless of degree program or level).

Skills	Very Confident % (N)	Somewhat Confident % (N)	Somewhat Not Confident % (N)	Not Confident % (N)
Integrate the findings from qualitative and quantitative data into research, policy or applied practice settings.	53% (55)	42% (43)	4% (4)	1% (1)
Communicate public health information to a variety of audiences.	72% (75)	21% (22)	6% (6)	1% (1)
Apply knowledge of the social and biological determinants of health to a public health challenge.	84% (81)	16% (17)	4% (4)	2% (2)
Advance population health, well-being and social justice.	55% (57)	37% (38)	6% (5)	4% (4)
Work effectively on an interprofessional team.	88% (91)	9% (9)	2% (2)	2% (2)
Implement and manage a public health project.	58% (60)	34% (35)	7% (7)	1% (1)
Propose strategies to resolve public health challenges.	56% (58)	36% (37)	7% (7)	2% (2)
Approach public health research, policy and practice with cultural awareness.	70% (73)	24% (25)	4% (4)	2% (2)

Between September 23, 2023, and January 4, 2024, the accreditation team interviewed 23 not-so-recent alums (2019 and earlier) from the school’s master’s and doctoral programs, with most having earned an MPH. Two of the interviews were conducted with DrPH graduates; none were with PhD graduates. Overall, interviewed alums felt that their graduate degrees from GW helped them either obtain a job after graduation or prepared them with the skills needed to perform their jobs. Based on their experiences in the public health workforce, alums recommended that GWSPH focus on communication techniques (e.g., appropriate literacy level, regaining the public’s trust and process for reaching out to politicians) and offer opportunities for students to learn about various fields in public health (e.g., consulting). Most of the other recommendations discussed mirrored those of recent graduates, described above.

On the Graduation Survey, GWSPH graduates (MPH, MS, MHA, DrPH and PhD) answer a series of five-point Likert scale questions regarding their perceptions on the effectiveness of the curricula. Response rates were 5% in 2020-2021. They increased in 2021-2022 to 74% and then decreased in 2022-2023 to 57%. Most responses were from residential MPH students, though all of the other programs were represented. All data were included in the analysis as students in all residential graduate programs can take public health coursework.

Question	2020-2021 Average (N)	2021-2022 Average (N)	2022-2023 Average (N)
Integration of current developments in my field.	4.2 (39)	4.3 (559)	4.2 (494)
My education prepared me for my career.	4.2 (39)	4.2 (561)	4.2 (492)
Program content supports my research or professional goals.	4.3 (39)	4.4 (560)	4.3 (494)
Program structure encourages student collaboration and/or teamwork.	4.2 (39)	4.5 (561)	4.5 (494)
The culminating experience provided me an opportunity to apply public health principles.	4.3 (38)	4.2 (548)	4.3 (466)
The program encouraged me to take responsibility for my own learning.	4.7 (38)	4.5 (549)	4.5 (470)
The program taught me how to work in a team/group to complete a project.	4.3 (39)	4.3 (547)	4.3 (470)

Open-ended responses to the Graduation Survey highlighted the variety of courses offered at GWSPH, both residential and online, and the support of a diverse and knowledgeable faculty. In particular, the skills-based courses were appreciated, such as the statistics and program development, implementation and evaluation courses. Several alums mentioned that they felt that the curriculum helped prepare them to excel in their future careers. GWSPH practice-based instructors provided real life experiences, making alums' classroom experiences more stimulating and engaging.

Suggested topics to be emphasized in future curricula included equity, anti-colonialism in global health/colonial history, political dimensions in global health, cultural norms and behavior, internal bias, immigrant health, veterans' health, and cultural mindfulness. Concerns voiced by alums included their need for greater assistance with the APEx (practicum) and advising (see Criteria [D5](#) and [H1](#), respectively). While there was significant variety of course offerings, the timing of those offerings was limited, particularly for working students. One alum mentioned that she had to choose courses based on timing rather than topic and interest.

In Fall 2022, residential MHA alums were asked about their perceptions on the structure of the MHA curriculum, particularly the fellowship component. The survey consisted of 12 open-ended questions, and responses were thematically analyzed. Overall, MHA graduates regarded the MHA program highly, feeling that the curriculum prepared them for success in healthcare management and provided them with valuable skills and knowledge to help them advance their careers. Alums considered the MHA fellowship an opportunity to gain real-world experience, enhance skills and advance their careers. The high financial cost of the fellowship was also discussed and often compared to the perceived long-term benefits of the experience. Based on these data, the MHA program is considering modifying their curriculum to decrease the financial burden of the fellowships. Additional feedback on this and other potential curricular changes for the MHA program can be found in the ERF (see ERF > Criterion B > Criterion B5 > B5.2: Alum percep_methods).

- 2) *Provide full documentation of the methodology and findings from quantitative and/or qualitative data collection.*

See ERF > Criterion B > Criterion B5 > B5.2: Alum percep_methods.

- 3) *If applicable, assess strengths and weaknesses related to this criterion and plans for improvement in this area.*

Strengths

- Response rates for the Graduation Survey are generally high (except for the significant dip during the COVID-19 pandemic). This can be attributed to the requirement that this survey be completed before Commencement Ceremony tickets can be ordered.
- Aside from the Graduation Survey, there are additional mechanisms in place for us to gather quantitative and qualitative feedback from alums regarding curricular effectiveness. For example, the Department of Health Policy and Management recently engaged almost 800 of their alums to learn about their post-graduation plans and request continued contact.

Challenges

- Given the numerous programs, the Graduation Survey is relatively generic. Feedback about specific program competencies or coursework is not systematically collected.
- Overall, doctoral graduate participation rates in the 2023 Alum Survey and Interview were low. Moving forward, GWSPH will make a concerted effort to connect with doctoral graduates through their doctoral program directors, mentors and dissertation chairs. If the request to participate comes from a faculty member whom the graduate has a relationship with, they may be more likely to participate.
- The 2023 Alum Survey and Interview asked respondents to identify their most recent earned degree from GWSPH and answer the questions based on that degree. Several graduate degree respondents mentioned during their interviews that they also earned a BS degree from GWSPH. Future iterations of the survey may address this gap in data collection.

Future Plans

- Based on feedback from residential MHA alums, the MHA program is considering reducing the credit requirements and restructuring the program so that the fellowship/residency requirement occurs in the summer between the first and second years of the program.