

**D8. DrPH Integrative Learning Experience**

**As part of an integrative learning experience, DrPH candidates generate field-based products consistent with advanced practice designed to influence schools, policies or systems addressing public health. The products demonstrate synthesis of foundational and concentration-specific competencies.**

**The integrative learning experience is completed at or near the end of the school of study. It may take many forms consistent with advanced, doctoral-level studies and university policies but must require, at a minimum, production of a high-quality written product.**

The policies, procedures and processes discussed in this criterion were implemented in fall 2023. Prior to fall 2023, the courses that students took to prepare for the dissertation were different, though the identification and assessment of competencies and the production of a high-quality dissertation remain the same. The key difference is that the topics of previous cohorts' dissertations may or may not be related to students' DAPEx, as is it under the fall 2023 curriculum (see ERF > Program Guides for information related to prior years' curricula).

- 1) *List, in the format of Template D8-1, the integrative learning experience for each DrPH concentration or generalist degree. The template also requires the school to explain, for each experience, how it ensures that the experience demonstrates synthesis of competencies.*

Template D8-1

<b>DrPH Integrative Learning Experience for Public Health Generalist</b>	
<b>Integrative learning experience</b>	<b>How competencies are synthesized</b>
Doctoral Dissertation	Students self-identify competencies during the dissertation proposal development phase. Students design a qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods, policy analysis or evaluation project to address a public health issue under the guidance of a Dissertation Committee and DAPEx site preceptor. The written proposal is orally defended by the student. As part of the proposal defense, students demonstrate how the project will synthesize DrPH foundational and program-specific competencies. The Dissertation Committee reviews the dissertation during the final dissertation defense for synthesis of the identified competencies.

- 2) *Briefly summarize the process, expectations and assessment for each integrative learning experience.*

Our program takes practice very seriously, and our focus on it goes beyond just addressing a requirement. Practicing DrPH competencies is how students learn what is necessary to move their own professional practice and leadership forward. Because of this, we have developed a dissertation portfolio that promotes practice by integrating the DAPEx throughout the curriculum and linking it to the dissertation.

Students are required to take eight courses related to the DrPH dissertation portfolio. These courses provide tailored support to DrPH students as they navigate the dissertation process, and it ensures that both online and residential cohorts take the same program of study. Two of these courses, PUBH 8700 and PUBH 8707 in the dissertation portfolio sequence, are didactic courses (highlighted in blue in the graphic below). The DAPEx serves as the practice project that students then write up as their dissertation. Our dissertation portfolio sequencing in our 2023 program

of study shows the integration of the DAPEX and dissertation throughout the entire program (see ERF > Program Guides).



Course	Summary of Content, Expectations and Assessment
PUBH 8700 DrPH Seminar and Introduction to DrPH Applied Practice Experience (DAPEX)	Introduction to the dissertation and DAPEX
PUBH 8703 Dissertation Portfolio: Independent Study 1 for DAPEX and Dissertation Proposal Development	Students identify a public health challenge and refine a feasible DAPEX and dissertation project.
PUBH 8705 Dissertation Portfolio: Independent Study 2 for DAPEX and Dissertation Proposal Development	Continuation of PUBH 8703 At the end of this course, students have an approved DAPEX project.
PUBH 8707 Dissertation Portfolio: Dissertation Proposal Development	Students develop their dissertation proposal. At the end of this course, students have a dissertation proposal that is ready for defense.
PUBH 8709 Dissertation Portfolio: Dissertation Proposal Defense	Students defend their dissertation proposal. Dissertation Committee must approve the dissertation proposal for the student to move forward.
PUBH 8711 Dissertation Portfolio: DAPEX and Dissertation Implementation	Students complete their DAPEX requirements. See Criterion D6.
PUBH 8713 Dissertation Portfolio: Dissertation Development	Students implement their dissertation under the guidance of their Dissertation Committee. At the end of this course, students have their dissertation ready for review by their Dissertation Committee in preparation for the defense.
PUBH 8715 Dissertation Portfolio: Dissertation Defense	After approval from their Dissertation Committee, students produce a written dissertation and orally defend their dissertation work. The presentation is open to the public followed by a closed-door session between the student and Dissertation Committee.

- 3) *Provide documentation, including syllabi and/or handbooks, that communicates integrative learning experience policies and procedures to students.*

See ERF > Criterion D > Criterion D8 > D8.3: DrPH ILE\_policies.

- 4) *Provide documentation, including rubrics or guidelines, that explains the methods through which faculty and/or other qualified individuals assess the integrative learning experience with regard to students' demonstration of the selected competencies.*

There is no difference in the assessment methods of the DrPH dissertation between previous cohorts and the fall 2023 curriculum.

See ERF > Criterion D > Criterion D8 > D8.4: DrPH ILE\_assessment.

- 5) *Include completed, graded samples of deliverables associated with each integrative learning experience option from different concentrations. The school must provide at least 10% of the number produced in the last three years or five examples, whichever is greater. If the school does not have five recent samples for an option, note this and provide all available samples.*

Samples of DrPH dissertations are from students in previous cohorts. They reflect a departmental and specialty-based approach to preparing and completing the dissertation. Under the new curriculum, the dissertation will still be of high quality, but will be produced during a different set of courses and will be related to the DAPEx. The approach to competency mapping remains consistent. No samples are available from students in the DrPH@GW program. The first samples produced under the new curricular plan probably won't be available until fall 2026 (for both residential and online DrPH students). However, faculty assisting current DrPH students with their dissertations may transition to this model of connecting the DAPEx to the dissertation sooner than fall 2026.

See ERF > Criterion D > Criterion D8 > D8.5: DrPH ILE\_samples.

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

#### Strengths

- The DrPH dissertations are increasingly practice-based, which distinguishes our DrPH program and dissertation products from our school's PhD program.
- An exciting new component of the DrPH curriculum is the dissertation portfolio, which provides students with more support, guidance and structure as they move through their practice experience and dissertation. It is a set of eight courses integrated into the curriculum that provide tailored support to DrPH students as they navigate the dissertation process, and it ensures that both online and residential cohorts follow the same program of study. The Dissertation Portfolio sequencing shows the integration of the DAPEx and dissertation throughout the entire program, starting in the first semester with PUBH 8700 DrPH Seminar and Introduction to DrPH Applied Practice Experience (DAPEx), and ending with students' dissertation defense in PUBH 8715.

#### Challenges

- The DrPH curriculum has changed several times over the last five years as the program transitioned to an updated curriculum and moved from department-based programs to a standardized, schoolwide program and, most recently, a change in regard to our practice experience and dissertation through the development of a dissertation portfolio, launching in fall 2023. As a result, there are several cohorts of students that have unique curricular plan (Cohorts 2021, 2022 and 2023). While the overarching themes and required dissertation products remain unchanged, the 2023-2024 curriculum, as described in this self-study, has a more streamlined approach for DAPEx to dissertation. In the future, students will produce related DAPEx and dissertation products based on the same work experience. Products will be distinct in that they will still meet the separate DAPEx and dissertation requirements.
- As part of the transition from department-based DrPH programs to a schoolwide DrPH program, some students expressed confusion about available opportunities that best met their academic and career goals. Ultimately, some students transferred from a department-based DrPH program to a PhD program or the schoolwide DrPH program or elected to remain in their current department-based DrPH. Until current department-

based DrPH students complete their degrees, GWSPH is effectively running multiple DrPH programs. This is resource-intensive and requires faculty to support students across multiple programs. GWSPH remains committed to ensuring all students, regardless of program choice, successfully complete their degrees.

- As the DrPH and DrPH@GW programs continue to grow, there will be additional challenges in ensuring students have DAPEX-to-dissertation opportunities and GWSPH faculty expertise, particularly practice-based expertise, on their dissertation committees. With the transition to a wholly new curriculum and dissertation model for DrPH (distinct from our PhD programs), it has been a challenge to ensure faculty are appropriately familiar with dissertation and committee expectations for all DrPH and PhD programs, especially the differences in dissertation work and committee work across programs.

#### Future Plans

- The new curriculum and streamlined plan for DAPEX and dissertation have yet to be implemented. It will be a few more years until this occurs because the curricular changes were implemented in fall 2023.