**How to Choose a School**

***Importance of Accreditation***

It is important to choose a school that has been accredited by the Council on Education for Public Heath, CEPH. They are the nationally recognized accrediting body for schools and programs of public health; the ASPPH is the association of all CEPH accredited schools. By attending an accredited school, you add weight and importance to your degree, it ensures that you will receive a well-rounded education and offer you internship and career opportunities not available through a non-accredited school.

***Type of Degree***

When choosing which schools to apply to for your graduate studies it is important to decide whether you wish to obtain a professional degree or an academic degree. Both have their benefits, however depending upon your intended career path, one will be more beneficial than another.

Professional degree programs are oriented towards students who plan to work in the public health field. A Masters of Public Heath is an example of a professional degree; other professional degrees are Doctor of Public Health and Masters of Health Administration. Students who choose to pursue these degrees are preparing for careers as practitioners of public health. These careers include working for non-profit organizations, hospitals, health departments, and governmental organizations, both domestic and foreign. Professional degree programs tend to provide more hands on experience compared with a more academic focused program.

Academic degree programs are designed for students who wish to pursue an academic career, either teaching at a university or conducting research at a university or other private setting. Academic degrees include a Master of Science in Public Health, Doctor of Philosophy in Public Health, and Doctor of Science in Public Health. If you are interested in an academic degree, it is important to be aware of what schools offer these programs. You want to ensure that the academic institution you plan to attend does in fact offer a MSPH or PhD in Public Health degree in your intended area of focus.

You should also consider whether you are interested in a joint degree, most public health programs offer a joint degree option as they are becoming increasingly popular. However, not all schools offer the same joint degrees; it is important to explore your options before hand to determine what joint degree you are interested in and what universities offer this program. Some examples of joint degrees are MPH/MBA, MD/MPH, MPH/JD, MPH/ MSW, and MPH/MPP. This is only a small sampling of joint degrees available; however, these are the most common. Additionally, if you are interested some schools offer a joint program with the Peace Corps, where students spend a year completing coursework, offered by serving in the Peace Corps for two years, which is the normal term of service. This combined program then results in an MPH degree, more information can be found through the Peace Corps [website](http://www.peacecorps.gov/learn/whyvol/eduben/mastersint/).

***Area of Concentration***

There are five core areas of public health that students can choose to specialize in; additionally, most schools require that students take one class in each discipline to ensure that they have a well-rounded knowledge base when they graduate. This also allows students who are unsure of their area of concentration to explore their options and determine which concentration best suits their interests and career goals. The areas of concentration are listed as follows. This information was found on the ASPPH website, for more information on the different concentrations and what you should expect to learn within that concentration, please visit their [website](http://www.asph.org/document.cfm?Page=929).

* Biostatistics is the development and application of statistical reasoning and methods in addressing, analyzing, and solving problems in public health; health care; and biomedical, clinical and population-based research. Biostatics often goes hand in hand with Epidemiology, and provides the foundation for quantitative research in public health. An example of biostatistics would be analyzing different health trends within a community.
* Environmental Health Sciences represent the study of environmental factors including biological, physical and chemical factors that affect the health of a community. This concentration is both scientific and regulatory in nature.
* Epidemiology is the study of patterns of disease and injury in human populations and the application of this study to the control of health problems. Epidemiologists are the public health professions who are asked to research the cause of a disease and determine the best ways to control it.
* Health Policy and Management is a multidisciplinary field of inquiry and practice concerned with the delivery, quality and costs of health care for individuals and populations. Depending upon the school, the program may be more focused on policy or management. If you are interested in health management, it might be useful to look into a Masters of Health Administration degree, MHA, as opposed to a MPH degree.
* Social and Behavioral Sciences in public health address the behavioral, social and cultural factors related to individual and population health and health disparities over the life course. This area is sort of a catch all for many other concentrations within public health. It is very interdisciplinary, and can greatly vary from school to school.

Many schools also offer students the opportunity to specialize in other areas such as Maternal and Child Health, International/Global Health, and Nutrition to name a few. If you are interested in one of these areas, you can use the ASPPH [search engine](http://www.asph.org/document.cfm?page=1106.) to see which schools offer these concentrations. Additionally, for more information on other concentrations visit the following [website](http://www.whatispublichealth.org/what/index.html), this offers information about academic disciplines.

***Career Path within Public Health***

It is important to consider your career path after completion of your graduate program. This can help you make determinations about the above categories. While it is not mandatory to know you intended career path when applying, and it may change throughout your graduate program, it is helpful to ensure that you pick the right program for you. Consider whether you intend to be a Health Educator after completion of graduate school, if this is the case then a MPH program concentrated in Health Education would be a great fit, as opposed a MSPH program focused in Epidemiology. While there is always cross over within programs, and your graduate degree does not lock you into a career path, you do want to choose a concentration and degree that makes sense and you that you will enjoy. Some different career paths within public health to consider can be:

* Administration/Management
* Community Practice and Leadership
* Health Education
* Health Policy
* Research
* Government Employee – Local, State or Federal Level
* International Health Policy/Development