

What is an MPH in Community Health Education?

A Master in Public Health (MPH) is a well-respected degree that has been available for decades. Traditionally, MPHs have only been offered at Schools of Public Health. There are a limited number of such schools in the country and only two in this region...the University of Illinois at Chicago and St. Louis University are the two closest.

Schools of Public Health are accredited by the 'golden standard' accreditation body called CEPH—the Council for the Education of Public Health. Without CEPH's accreditation, Schools of Public Health are often unable to attract the outside funding that accredited programs are able to obtain. Typically a School of Public Health has five or six basic areas of public health—biostatistics, epidemiology, health administration, environmental health, health behavior. In fact, CEPH's requirement is that EVERYBODY who earns an MPH must have these core courses within their program.

In the early 1970s, a number of universities who did not have a School of Public Health decided to offer MPH's. These are called programs/degrees *outside* Schools of Public Health. Historically, CEPH would only accredit those programs that had majors in Community Health Education or Preventive Medicine/Community Health.

In spring of 2002 the faculty in the health education program at Southern Illinois University decided to forward a proposal to offer an MPH in Community Health Education. It would replace the extremely successful MS in Community Health Education. In addition, it is the intent of the program to seek accreditation (since this does fall within the realm of what CEPH will accredit). The program was approved in summer, 2004 with the first cohort starting in Fall, 2004.

So what does one expect from an MPH in Community Health Education? Like a College of Education that offers an MS in Education (with numerous majors in various subjects like English, Math, Physical Education, Health Education), there are numerous majors that one can earn with an MPH. In a School of Public Health it is not unusual to see majors in Biostatistics, Epidemiology, Health Administration, Environmental Health, Health Behavior/Community Health Education. All of these students must take a certain selection of courses from each of these foundation areas (commonly called the Core Courses), and then the remaining hours are of their particular major.

The MPH that we (SIU) are offering must match the requirements that CEPH has of any MPH program (within or outside Schools of Public Health). Thus, students from our program are required to take courses from each of the 'core' areas of public health (biostatistics; epidemiology; administration; health behavior; environmental health). The only difference is that these courses are taught by faculty in the same department (SIU's Health Education). In a School of Public Health for example, the biostatistics course is taught from faculty in the Department of Biostatistics.

The *major* selected by our department is Community Health Education—because we are a group of faculty in health education, AND because this is one of the options outside Schools of Public Health that can be accredited.

Thus, you will be taking some of the ‘core’ public health courses in our program—Biostatistics (HED 489), Epidemiology (HED 593), Health Administration (HED 483 and HED 532), Environmental Health (HED 488), and Health Behavior (HED 525). Those core courses are a total of 18 hours. You are then to take the remaining 25 hours focusing specifically on community health education. These 25 hours also include a 6 hour internship.

By selecting this degree you are becoming a public health educator. That is the interest and expertise of the faculty. Although you will have taken several core courses, you will not be trained as a public health epidemiologist, a public health administrator, a public health biostatistician, or a public health environmentalist. Your expertise will be in community health education. That expertise will be brought forth from courses such as Program Planning (HED 510); Community Organization (HED 500); Foundations of Health Education (HED 533a); Evaluation in Health Education (HED 526); and Grant Writing (HED 598). This totals 16 hours. You will also need to take 6 hours of HED 590 Practicum and 3 hours of electives.