

careers in
public health



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public health

biostatistician	Workers in public health fields focus on the community, national and global health of entire populations rather than individuals and prevention rather than treatment after people are already sick or injured. They identify global, national, or community groups at risk for disease, develop public policy initiatives that address health problems, and work to ensure that all individuals receive adequate health care. All public health specialists work towards the ultimate goal of health promotion and disease prevention, but they differ in their methods and roles. They work as leaders, managers, educators, program designers and evaluators, policy analysts, advocates, and researchers. Public health fields are numerous. The main divisions include: biostatistics, environmental health, epidemiology, health education/behavior, health policy and management, international health, as well as others.
environmental scientist	
health educator	
health policy and management	
epidemiologist	

academic requirements

Completion of a Master's of Public Health (MPH) degree prepares one to work in the field. Other master's level degrees are also possible. Attending an accredited school of public health is recommended. Programs are one to two years in length. Undergraduate prerequisites may include: one year of college math, one year of natural sciences (biology, chemistry, physics), humanities, and social science courses. Particular fields prefer additional classes: two years of health and epidemiology; sociology, education, psychology, and anthropology for health education/behavior; and a second language for international health. Experience relevant to public health is also preferred. Advanced degrees such as DrPH and PhD are usually needed for those who want to do research and/or teach.

Because of the diverse scope of public health, public health degrees can be combined with degrees in many fields: medicine, nursing, dentistry, social work, nutrition, engineering, law, veterinary medicine and others.

Please note: Obtaining a Master's degree in Public Health will not make students more competitive for medical school. Unless the graduate program includes science courses, it will not help a student's candidacy for medical school.

medicine vs. public health

	MEDICINE	PUBLIC HEALTH
primary focus	individual	population
personal service ethic	as social responsibility	as extension of concerns for the individual
emphasis	disease diagnosis, treatment, and care for the individual patient	disease prevention and health promotion for whole community
paradigm	medical care	spectrum of interventions aimed at environment, human behavior, and medical care
specialist certification	uniform system for certification beyond medical degree	variable certification beyond professional degree
specialist organization	organ system (cardiology, neurology), patient group (obstetrics, pediatrics), etiology and pathophysiology (infectious disease, oncology), technical skill (radiology, surgery)	analytical method (epidemiology, toxicology), setting and population (occupation, international health), substantive health promotion (environmental health, nutrition)
role of biological sciences	central to profession, stimulated by patient needs	central to profession, stimulated by major threats to health of population
research	vacillates between laboratory and bedside	vacillates between laboratory and field
role of numerical sciences	increasing prominence, but still relatively minor part of training	essential feature of analysis and training
role of social sciences	tends to be an elective part of education	integral part of education

* courtesy of Harvard School of Public Health

technical terms

APHA - American Public Health Association
ASPH - Association of Schools of Public Health
CEPH - Council of Education for Public Health
CPH - Certified in Public Health
EPI - Epidemiology
PHTC - Public Health Teaching Centers
SOPHAS - School of Public Health Admissions Services

public health concentrations

Upon applying for a graduate program in Public Health, students are asked to choose a concentration. Below are explanations to the most common concentrations:

biostatistics - the use of statistical methodology for analyzing health related data

epidemiology - the study of the distribution and determinants of disease and disability in populations

health services administration - the study of health care systems, health care reform, health law, financial management, clinic management, and policy analysis

health education/behavioral science - the practice of selecting, applying and monitoring appropriate behavioral, social and political change strategies to enhance the health of populations

environmental health - the study of issues associated with the adverse chemical, physical and biological agents in the environment on human health

In addition, many schools offer the following concentrations:

women's health
occupational health/ community health/ environmental health
health policy
biomedical laboratory science/ international health
maternal and child health
nutrition
global health
public health practice/program management

admission factors


GPA The average competitive GPA for gaining admissions to a program or school of public health is 3.0. The average GPA of accepted students varies greatly from school to school. Some schools focus on your science GPA whereas others are primarily interested in the GPA of your last two years. In addition, many schools take into consideration that a GPA at some undergraduate institutions may be more difficult to attain than at others.

GRE Scores Many students wonder how their GRE scores compare to the average scores of admitted students to a public health program. A competitive score is one above the 50% percentile. Similar to GPA, there are applicants with a wide range of GRE scores that are accepted to public health school. Keep in mind that the GRE is only one component of your application. Several schools will accept MCAT scores in lieu of GRE scores. Check the requirements of the specific programs for more information.

Undergraduate Coursework and Previous Majors Graduate students in public health have a wide array of undergraduate majors, from biology to math to economics. Yet for some concentrations in public health, a specific undergraduate major is helpful in preparing the student for graduate work.

For example, if you are interested in epidemiology or biostatistics, a math major or basic science major is ideal. For Behavioral Sciences or Health Education, you might want to consider sociology, psychology or anthropology as a major. For studying Health Services Administration, you might want to consider a business background. To study Global Health, a social science degree is helpful. For those who want to study Environmental Health, you might want to study either a biology/chemistry. Maternal and Child Health lends itself to biology or social sciences. (Courtesy of the Association of Schools of Public Health)

Letters of Recommendation Three letters of recommendation are necessary to submit your application to most graduate programs. In general, two of the three recommendations should be academic if you are graduating or have graduated in the past couple years. They should be from faculty who know you well instead of those who simply sound prestigious.



Experience Graduate programs recognize that it is often difficult to get experience in public health without a bachelor's or graduate degree. That being said, admissions committees look favorably on applicants who have tested their interest in public health with internships, volunteer work, or on-campus activities. Such experiences will demonstrate that you are serious about pursuing a career in public health.

Application Essays Personal statements should address your reasons behind seeking admission to a graduate school, your qualifications, and how that specific school will help reach your career goals. Be sure to create a separate essay for each school you apply to and carefully critique your essay before submitting it. Also, make sure to abide by the word requirement for each school – some schools ask for 1500 words, yet others request less than 500.

Interview Some schools offer interviews to students once the application has been thoroughly reviewed. Interviews allow you the chance to demonstrate your interest in their programs, as well as to learn more about that specific university. If you would like to practice your interview skills, stop by the Career Exploration Center in 162 Martha Van Rensselaer Hall to schedule a mock interview or receive interview practice “on the spot” with a walk-in mock interview.

contact information:
617.612.2090
SOPHASinfo@
SOPHAS.org

SOPHAS (Schools of Public Health Application Service) is the common application of public health graduate programs. The more schools you apply for, the lower the application fee per school. The application opens each September and asks you to provide personal and contact information, transcripts, recommendations, a personal statement, and class work. Plan ahead! It may take several weeks for your information to be processed.

In the next few pages are the instructions for creating and using an account with SOPHAS. If you have any specific problems, you can contact SOPHAS for help.

Keep in mind that not all schools use SOPHAS to admit students to their programs. If you do not see the school you are interested in on the list, refer to that university's admissions page for more details.

abbreviated instructions

Deadlines

Apply early! Processing for SOPHAS begins in the beginning of September each year but individual schools of public health have different deadlines. Check with individual schools' admissions offices for the specific deadlines for your schools of public health designations. Submitting materials early will ensure timely processing and help avoid delays.

You should submit your application as soon as you have completed the online information. Processing will then begin when all required official transcripts, letters of recommendation, and payments are received by SOPHAS. It is your responsibility to ensure application materials and official transcripts meet designated deadlines. Once you have submitted payment, refunds cannot be made.

You should submit your materials before the deadlines. Though the processing time is usually shorter, during peak periods, it may take up to four (4) weeks to process your application and mail it to your designated schools of public health. Keep in mind that holiday and end-of-term schedules can also create backlogs in the registrar's office that may delay the mailing of the transcripts. SOPHAS is not responsible for any materials lost in the mail or for delays caused by the registrar's office. Express or certified mail does not obtain expedient processing nor does sending application materials or transcripts via express or certified mail guarantee receipt by SOPHAS.

* Courtesy of sophas.org, see the detailed instructions found within the SOPHAS application portal for complete instructions.



SOPHAS Application Fees

The SOPHAS application fee is \$125 for the first school or program, and \$45 for each additional school, even if you submit those applications later in the cycle.

SOPHAS now only accepts online credit cards for payment (Visa, MasterCard, American Express, or Discover).

Application Fee Waivers

A limited number of application fee waivers are available. Please e-mail SOPHASinfo@SOPHAS.org if you would like to know if fee waivers are still available. Fee waiver requests must be received and processed prior to submitting a SOPHAS application. To be considered for a SOPHAS fee waiver, applicants must fill out and submit a Fee Waiver Request Form (found online) as well as submit additional documentation specific to the waiver program for which you are applying.

After you create your account for an application, please see the detailed instructions found within the SOPHAS application for more information about fee waivers.

Before you submit your application, you must make sure SOPHAS will receive official copies of your transcripts. Request an additional copy of your transcripts for your use in completing the Coursework section of your application.

U.S. transcripts: You must request that the registrar of each U.S. institution you have attended submits one complete set of official transcripts directly to SOPHAS. We highly encourage you to submit your request with the transcript request form which is found online, to ensure that your transcript is successfully matched with your application. Student copies of transcripts or copies sent to SOPHAS by the applicant cannot be accepted. Transfer credit appearing on a transcript cannot be accepted in lieu of an official transcript from the institution where the course work was taken.

Before You Apply

Foreign (non-U.S.) Transcripts: Some schools require copies of transcripts (also known as marks sheets) from foreign institutions, while others require an evaluation of coursework taken at foreign institutions by an evaluation services. It is your responsibility to determine which documents are required by the school of public health to which you are applying.



Before You Apply

If your designated schools of public health require that you use a Foreign Transcript Evaluation Service such as WES, you must contact the Evaluation Service for its specific transcript-receipt policies. A partial list of evaluation services can be found on the online instructions. All institutions attended (including foreign institutions) must be listed on your application (Section 10). However, it is not necessary to list all coursework undertaken at a non-U.S. institution in your application (Section 11).

Instructions for Reapplicants

If you've e-submitted an application in the current application cycle, you can re-apply easily online. Find the re-applicant link on the applicant portal login page. From there, update your information that is automatically filled, and follow the given instructions.

General Instructions

Section 1: Contact Information

Fill out this section as completely as possible. Your application cannot be submitted without this information. If there are any fields that are required but that you cannot answer due to extenuating circumstances, please contact SOPHAS customer service prior to mailing your application to SOPHAS. International applicants: please enter your name in the application exactly as it appears on your passport. Also, you are required to enter your international address as the permanent address, regardless of your current residence.

Section 2: Personal Information


Fill out this section as completely as possible. Your application cannot be submitted without this information. This information is used strictly for statistical and reporting purposes, and will not affect any admissions decisions.

Sections 3,4,6,7: Research and Work Experience, Community and Volunteer Service, Relevant Honors and Awards, Other Relevant Information

These sections are available for you to enter the appropriate information commensurate with these sections. Please fill in the fields as completely as possible. Even if your designated schools request that you submit a CV/resume, you may wish to complete this section as well because this section allows the schools to view a brief description of your relevant experience.

Section 5: Additional Information

This section is required. You must answer all questions in this section in order for your application to be considered complete.



Section 8: Language Proficiency

This section will ask you to report your proficiency in reading, writing, listening and speaking in up to five languages. If English is your only language, do not complete this section.

Section 9: Standardized Tests

This section is optional. Make sure to check with your designated schools of public health to see whether they require any standardized test scores. If your schools require such scores you must enter the scores on this application and then arrange to have your scores sent directly from the appropriate testing service either to SOPHAS or to your designated schools, depending on the policies of your designated schools.

Section 10: Colleges/Universities Attended


This section is required. Include all undergraduate, graduate, vocational, professional institutions you are either currently attending or have attended in this section. Both institutions in the U.S. and outside of the U.S. must be entered. If you did not have a major or did not receive a degree at any of your institutions attended, indicate “N/A” in these fields.

Section 11: Coursework

You must enter all coursework taken at any U.S. undergraduate, graduate, post-baccalaureate, and vocational institutions in this section. You must use official transcripts from the institutions you attended to complete this section. Do not attempt to enter coursework from one school using transfer credit listings on another—this will result in inaccuracies and delays and may necessitate that your application be sent back to you for editing. Please refer to the coursework section on-line for complete instructions on entering coursework.

Section 12: Curriculum Vitae

Some schools require either a curriculum vitae or a resume be submitted with your application. Please check with the schools to which you are applying to find out if either is required. If you will be submitting a CV or resume with your application, you may upload this document in the CV/resume section. The Career Exploration Center (162 Martha Van Rensselaer Hall) holds resume critiques on a walk-in basis.



Section 13: Statement of Purpose and Objectives

This section is required. The statement of purpose and objectives is intended to give you the opportunity to submit a narrative to each school to which you are applying describing your past education, experience, and current professional career objectives. You are encouraged to comment on any or all of the following: plans you have to use your education and training; the needs and/or challenges you perceive as important in your field of study; and any personal qualities, characteristics, and skills you believe will enable you to be successful in your chosen field of study. If you wish to send different essays to different schools, you may save each essay individually in the online application and may upload the statement to the appropriate schools. Your statement(s) must be limited to approximately 1500 words. You are encouraged to compose your statement in a text-only word processor (e.g., Notepad, not Word), review your statement for errors, then cut and paste the final version into the text box. Please see the full instructions online for more complete formatting instructions.

Section 14: References

Three letters of reference are required by SOPHAS but you may select up to five people to write letters of reference for your SOPHAS application. The participating schools of public health have individual policies regarding how many letters are required and who should be listed as a recommender, so be sure to contact the schools of public health to which you plan to apply before you contact your recommenders to ask about the individual schools' letter of recommendation policies.

Section 15: Designations

You may select the school(s) and the specific degree program(s) to which you wish to apply in this section. Please be sure to indicate the specific degrees, program areas and concentrations (if applicable) in which you are interested.

Each school of public health may have a different policy regarding the number of degrees and concentrations to which an applicant may apply. Please use the Designation Rules table found in the SOPHAS application as a guide to correct designation of schools, degrees and programs. It is your responsibility to investigate the policies of your designated schools—incorrectly selected designations may delay the processing of your application.

When you select a school of public health, you may be prompted to ask a few additional questions that are specific to the particular school(s) to which you are applying. Please answer these questions and keep in mind that your answers will only be viewed by the specific school(s) asking the questions.



Submitting Your Application

You should submit your application by the submission deadlines listed in the designation section of SOPHAS. All deadlines are midnight eastern time of stated deadline date. Please be aware that during peak processing times, processing your application may take at least 4 weeks so we encourage you to submit your application as early as possible. Be sure to print out a copy of your application for your own records prior to submitting it to SOPHAS. It is your responsibility to track the status of your application. Generally speaking, SOPHAS will not contact you to acknowledge receipt of your application or corresponding application materials. See below for information on how to check the status of your application.

Check Your Status

After you apply, you can check on the status of your application via the status menu. Please check back frequently to ensure that all of your documents have been received.

how can cornell prepare you?

From academics to extracurricular activities, there are numerous opportunities to form a foundation in public health even as an undergraduate. Below you will find coursework, programs, and student organizations geared towards student interested in pursuing a job in the field of healthcare.

Related Coursework

B&SOC/STS 2051 - Ethical Issues in Health & Medicine - 4 credits, fall
COMM 2850 - Communication, Environment, Science, & Health - 3 credits, spring
DSOC 2200 - Sociology of Health of Ethnic Minorities - 3 credits, fall
NS 1150 - Nutrition, Health, and Society - 3 credits, fall
NS 3060 - Nutrition and Global Health - 3 credits, fall
NS 3600 - Epidemiology - 3 credits, fall
NS 4500 - Public Health Nutrition - 2 credits, spring
NS 4600 - Explorations in Global and Public Health - 3 credits, fall
PAM 2350 - US Health Care System - 3 credits, fall
S&SOC/HD 4570 - Health and Social Behavior - 3 credits, fall


Global & Public Health Sciences Major

The Global & Public Health Sciences major teaches the tools of public health research and action, and their application to population health issues in the U.S. and around the world. Sustained improvement of the health of populations often requires a multidisciplinary approach involving the biomedical, social, behavioral, political and environmental sciences, and careful consideration of the importance of cultural and ethical contexts.

To learn more about this major and eligibility, refer to:
<http://www.human.cornell.edu/dns/academic/gphsmajor.cfm>.

Urban Semester/ Urban Summer Program

Students learn through a cycle of experience and reflection. Over the course of the semester or summer (eight weeks), students learn how to implement experience-based learning techniques and perspectives to enhance their competencies as initiators of professional practice. Students spend three or four days each week in an internship of their own choosing. One day each week, students have discussions with professionals who represent different aspects of the New York City economy. This exposure enables students to explore a variety of professional perspectives and practices. Students participate in reflection seminars with the director of the program to explore student internship experiences and learning.



Pre-health students interested in the Urban Semester Program enroll in HE 4902: Professional Practice and the World of Medicine, and have a series of rotations, internships, and volunteer experience to prepare them for different areas of the health care spectrum.

Global Health Minor

The Global Health minor is intended to complement any academic major offered at the University and to provide students with basic knowledge about global health as well as the necessary skills and experience to begin to build their own unique global health career. The minor is open to all undergraduate students in all colleges. The Global Health Minor is designed around three specific educational objectives for students: to learn more about the problems of global health in a classroom setting; to experience the issues in global health firsthand in a field setting; and to be exposed to the variety of careers available in global health by working with graduate and medical students and faculty who are currently engaged in the field.

See the following questions for a summary of requirements.

Who can pursue the minor?

It is open to all undergraduate students in all colleges.

How many credits is it?

15 credits, with the ideal order of: (1) NS 2600 (2) 3 electives, 9 credits minimum, (3) 8 week abroad field experience (4) NS 4600

What are the core courses?

There are 2 core courses:

1. NS 2600 - Introduction to Global Health - spring
2. NS 4600 - Explorations in Global Health - fall

What about elective courses?

Take 3 elective courses distributed across different departments. See the list of approved elective courses on the website.

Do I have to do an abroad field experience?

Yes; it must be in a resource poor setting. A total of 8 weeks of active engagement is required. It must be approved by the Global Health Program office before departure and take place after completing NS 2600. There are Cornell Summer Programs, or you can do an approved, independent program.

How can I learn more?

Visit www.human.cornell.edu/che/DNS/globalhealth

student organizations

Cornell Health International

To provide Cornell students with the opportunity to 1) Expand their knowledge of global health and development issues, 2) Lead awareness events concerning public health, and 3) Directly engage in projects, both domestic and abroad, that provide health education and/or aid to those in need.

Cornell Student Society for Public Health

Cornell Student Society for Public Health is an organization created to discuss and create awareness about healthcare infrastructure issues and epidemiological trends that are affecting developing countries around the world. The organization works to address the health threats of different communities worldwide; paying special attention to the social context disease. The organization hopes to empower students by gaining insight on how a degree in public health can be applied to careers in the “real world.” Its operations include working on healthcare intervention projects in the United States and abroad, bringing awareness to infectious neglected diseases, conducting a “Development in Health Policy” discussion series, providing workshops on public health careers, and being a resource for international internships and fellowships. The organization also works with local Cornell and Ithaca community members to organize events and encourage education about the same.

Cornell Undergraduate Health Cooperative

The Cornell Undergraduate Health Cooperative is an umbrella organization designed to foster cooperation and communication between Cornell’s many health-related undergraduate clubs. Each relevant club may request to send 1-2 board members to CUHC monthly meetings.

website: www.sickinamerica.com

Cornell Women’s Health Alliance

This group works to raise awareness in the Cornell community about the unique health issues women face. College-age women often are unaware of various health risks or the long-term health implications of their current choices. Each semester, the members of the club will decide to focus on a specific women’s health issue that they believe to be pertinent. In the past, the organization has focused on HPV and sexual health awareness as well as women’s nutrition.

HealthNutS

HealthNutS is the Health and Nutrition Society Undergraduate Organization. Through volunteer work and programs with local organizations, they bring health and nutrition awareness to the Cornell community and beyond to the greater Ithaca area.

Pre-Professional Association Towards Careers in Health

The mission of PATCH is to provide Cornell undergraduates with the resources they need to make informed decisions about future careers in health. The association exposes its members to different opportunities available in the health field, while giving them strategies to help them work towards their goal of a health-related career. Finally, PATCH brings together pre-med and pre-health students in a supportive, social atmosphere so that they may learn from and help each other.

Student Health Alliance at Cornell

SHAC is a pre-med and pre-health undergraduate student organization affiliated with Gannett. The alliance's purpose is to promote awareness and discussion of health-related issues on the Cornell campus through lectures, informal dialogue, and other public service events and activities.

Black Bio-Medical and Technical Association

BBMTA of Cornell University is a non-profit organization primarily composed of students of color who are interested in health-related issues that affect our communities. An important part of BBMTA is to act as a community service group that provides information about particular health issues to people of color in the Cornell, Ithaca and surrounding areas. A counseling and advising service is also available to students to provide support throughout their undergraduate years. In addition, BBMTA members serve as mentors for children in the Ithaca community.

resources

American Public Health Association

"The Association aims to protect all Americans and their communities from preventable, serious health threats and strives to assure community-based health promotion and disease prevention activities and preventive health services are universally accessible in the United States. APHA represents a broad array of health professionals and others who care about their own health and the health of their communities."

website: www.apha.org



**Association of Schools
of Public Health**

“ASPH promotes the efforts of schools of public health to improve the health of every person through education, research, and policy. Based upon the belief that ‘you’re only as healthy as the world you live in,’ ASPH works with stakeholders to develop solutions to the most pressing health concerns and provides access to the ongoing initiatives of the schools of public health.”
website: www.asph.org

**ExploreHealth
Careers.org**

“Everything you want to know about a wide variety of health careers.” website: www.explorehealthcareers.org

**Partners in Information
Access for Public
Health Workforce**

“Partners in Information Access for the Public Health Workforce is a collaboration of U.S. government agencies, public health organizations, and health sciences libraries which provides timely, convenient access to selected public health resources on the Internet.”
website: phpartners.org

PublicHealthJobs.net

“PublicHealthJobs.net is a FREE job and resume posting area that is provided by the Association of Schools of Public Health as a public service.”
website: www.publichealthjobs.net

**Schools of Public
Health Application
Service**

“SOPHAS is a service of CEPH-accredited schools of public health. Accredited schools of public health have a combined faculty of over 9,900 and educate more than 23,000 students annually from every state in the U.S. and most countries throughout the world. The schools graduate approximately 7,400 professionals each year.”
website: sophas.org

What is Public Health?

“‘What is Public Health?’ was created to answer three questions: (1) What does public health encompass?, (2) What impact does public health have on our lives?, and (3) What types of careers are available in the field of public health?”
website: www.whatispublichealth.org



