

Advising Guide for Public Health Majors

Academic Year 2026-27

(Version Date: 8/21/2026)

This guide is intended to help Public Health majors plan courses, understand sequencing, and make purposeful decisions about research, internships, graduate school, and career preparation. The guide supplements, but does not replace, the UC Merced Academic [Catalog](#), [SSHA academic advising](#), or official degree audit requirements. Students should meet with their academic advisor every semester, especially before registration, because course availability, prerequisites, GE overlap, transfer credit, and catalog year can affect individual plans.

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1 Welcome to Public Health at UC Merced!

Public Health focuses on the health and wellbeing of groups of people. It asks how organized social action can prevent disease, promote health, prolong life, and improve quality of life. Public Health draws on the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities to understand patterns of health and illness and to design interventions at individual, community, institutional, policy, and environmental levels.

At UC Merced, the [Public Health Department](#) prepares students to understand, promote, and protect health in the San Joaquin Valley, California, and the world. Our undergraduate programs emphasize population health, health equity, prevention, evidence-based practice, community engagement, and the social, biological, environmental, and structural conditions that shape health. Students learn to ask public health questions, interpret data, understand health disparities, communicate clearly with different audiences, and apply public health concepts to real-world problems.

The Department offers two majors: The **Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Public Health** and the **Bachelor of Science (BS) in Public Health**. The majors share foundations in core areas of public health, including epidemiology, biostatistics, health promotion, the healthcare system, and environmental health. They differ in emphasis, required coursework, sequencing, and preparation for post-graduation pathways. Students should work closely with their academic advisor to make sure they are following the requirements for their specific degree plan.

1.1 The Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) in Public Health

The **B.A. in Public Health** provides a broad, interdisciplinary foundation in the principles and practice of public health. It is especially suited for students interested in the social, cultural, and political dimensions of health.

Students in the B.A. learn how health is shaped by social conditions, institutions, policies, environments, and systems of inequality and develop skills in interpreting public health evidence, thinking critically about complex societal challenges, communicating with diverse audiences, and understanding how public health work happens across communities, organizations, and policy settings.

The B.A. can prepare students for careers in public health practice, community-based and nonprofit organizations, health education and health communication, health policy, advocacy, government agencies, international health, and related fields. It also prepares students for graduate or professional study in public health, public policy, law, social work, health administration, education, or other related disciplines.

1.2 The Bachelor of Science (B.S.) in Public Health

The **B.S. in Public Health** provides a public health foundation with additional coursework in the natural sciences. It is designed for students who want stronger preparation in biology, chemistry, quantitative reasoning, epidemiology, biostatistics, and the biological dimensions of population health.

Students in the B.S. study the intersections between biological and social determinants of health, with attention to how disease, risk, prevention, and intervention operate at the population level. The curriculum prepares students to understand public health through both scientific and social lenses, including exposure to biology, chemistry, epidemiologic reasoning, research methods, public health nutrition, biomedical ethics, health promotion, health communication, environmental health, and public health research.

The B.S. can prepare students for public health practice, data-related public health roles, clinical and behavioral research, nonprofit and government work, health-related graduate and professional programs, and other professional pathways that benefit from strong natural science preparation.

1.2.1 The B.S., Pre-Med Emphasis

Students in the B.S. who are interested in medical school or other health professional programs may pursue the **Pre-Med Emphasis**. This emphasis adds coursework needed for pre-health preparation, including additional chemistry, organic chemistry, physics, calculus, biochemistry, and human physiology. The Pre-Med Emphasis is intended for students preparing for medical, dental, veterinary, pharmacy, physician assistant, nursing, or other health professional pathways, though students should confirm specific prerequisite expectations for the programs to which they plan to apply.

Students considering the Pre-Med Emphasis should begin planning early because the course sequence is more structured than the general B.S. pathway. They should meet regularly with their academic advisor and consult pre-health advising resources to make sure they are completing both Public Health degree requirements and prerequisites for their intended professional program.

1.3 Advising

First-year students receive [academic advising](#) through the [Bobcat Advising Center](#). After your first year, you'll work with the public health academic advisor from the [School of Social Sciences, Humanities, and Arts Advising](#). Academic advisors help students understand campus, School, General Education, and major requirements; evaluate transfer and AP/IB credit; interpret degree audits; and plan a feasible path to graduation.

Students **should meet with an academic advisor in the middle of each semester**, before registration begins, so they know which courses to prioritize when their registration window

opens. This is especially important because Public Health is a large major, demand for required courses is high, and upper-division courses may depend on prerequisites or recommended sequencing. *Do not wait until registration has already begun to seek advising!*

1.4 Registering for courses

The Public Health faculty and advising staff have worked closely with the Registrar to create an ideal schedule for your first semester at UC Merced. We strongly encourage all incoming students to select the Block Schedule, as it is designed to place students in an appropriate first-semester sequence for the major and to support timely completion of major and campus-wide requirements. Taking the Block Schedule also helps ensure that you begin the major alongside a cohort of other Public Health majors. Many students build study groups, learn how to navigate the major and UC Merced together, and begin forming the networks that will support them throughout their time at UC Merced. Public Health is a large major, and students are more likely to thrive when they make early connections with classmates, advisors, and faculty.

1.4.1 Fall 2026 Recommended Schedule (Block Scheduling)

	Fall 2026 Public Health Courses	Fall 2026 Non-PH Courses
B.A.	PH 005 Global & International Health	BIO 003 WRI 001/WRI 010 SPRK 001/SPRK010 1 elective from the following: • SOC 020 Social Problems • PHIL 006 Science, Tech, & Ethics • AHS 010 Community Engagement
B.S.	PH 001 Introduction to Public Health	BIO 011/011L MATH 011 WRI 001/WRI010
B.S., Pre-Med Emphasis	PH 001 Introduction to Public Health	BIO 011/011L MATH 011 WRI 001/WRI010

After your first semester, you should **register as soon as your registration window opens**. We're one of the larger majors in the School of Social Sciences, Humanities, and Arts, and demand for our courses is high. Prioritize required courses before electives when possible.

1.4.2 Spring 2027 Recommended Schedule

	Spring 2027 PH Courses	Spring 2027 Non-PH Courses
B.A.	PH 001 Introduction to Public Health PH 010 Introduction to Biostatistics	General Education Requirement: World Language Elective or additional General Education requirement.
B.S.	PH 005 Global & International Health	BIO 012/012L MATH 012 SPRK 001/SPRK 010
B.S., Pre-med	PH 005 Global & International Health	BIO 012/012L MATH 012 SPRK 001/SPRK 010 <i>Recommended (1 unit course):</i> MED 011 Intro to Medical Learning

1.5 Transfer Students

Welcome to UC Merced! We want to make sure that you're getting the most out of your time with our program. Transfer students often arrive with many lower-division and General Education requirements completed, but individual plans to graduation from UC Merced depend on your specific prior coursework, catalog year, and degree path (B.A., B.S.). Transfer students should meet with their Bobcat and SSHA Academic Advisors early to confirm which major requirements have been satisfied and how to prioritize the remainder. Transfer students interested in research, internships, health professional schools, or graduate study should begin planning immediately upon arrival at UC Merced.

2 Planning Your Degree Path: Timing and Additional Information

Students should think about course planning in two ways: meeting requirements and building toward a goal. The four-year plans below show one recommended path through each major, but your actual plan may vary depending on AP/IB or transfer credit, placement, summer courses, General Education requirements, course availability, work schedules, and whether you are preparing for graduate school, professional school, or employment after graduation.

The most important rule is *sequencing*. Take foundational courses early, complete prerequisites before upper-division courses, and meet with an academic advisor every semester before registration. Required courses should usually come before electives, especially in the B.S. and B.S. Pre-Med Emphasis, where science and math sequences affect later options.

2.1 How to Use the Four-Year Plans

The plans below are designed to help you understand the usual timing of required courses. They assume steady progress toward 120 units and a typical full-time course load. Use these tables alongside the UC Merced General Catalog, your degree audit, the Schedule of Classes, and SSHA Academic Advising. Each year has a different purpose:

Year	Academic Objectives	Beyond the Classroom
1	Build foundations in public health, writing, GE, science/math as needed	Learn the major Meet classmates Attend Public Health Society events Join clubs and activities on campus Meet with advising before registration
2	Complete lower-division and gateway courses; begin epidemiology, biostatistics, and environmental/system foundations	Explore career interests Attend Public Health research talks (colloquium) Look for volunteer or campus work related to public health
3	Move into upper-division public health skills: health promotion, communication, research methods, health systems, electives	Consider research or internships Take on leadership roles Consider attending a conference or two Explore graduate/professional school pathways
4	Complete advanced requirements, electives, capstone, and post-graduation planning	Prepare portfolio materials Apply for jobs or graduate/professional school

2.2 B.A. in Public Health: Four-Year Plan

The B.A. gives students flexibility while building a broad public health foundation.

The first year of public health coursework establishes public health, biology, writing, GE, and quantitative preparation. In the second year, students move into epidemiology and environmental health. The third year emphasizes applied public health skills: health promotion, health communication, research methods, and the health care system. The fourth year should be used to complete electives, finish GE requirements, and complete PH 181 as the culminating experience.

Year	Fall	Spring
1	PH 005 BIO 003 WRI 010 SPRK 001/SPRK 010	PH 001 PH 010 Language GE Elective
2	PH 100 Physical Sciences GE Elective Elective	PH 110 Elective Elective Elective
3	PH 102 PH 112 Media and Visual Analysis GE Elective	PH 103 PH 105 PH Elective Elective
4	PH elective Crossroads GE Elective	PH 181 Elective Elective

Advising note: B.A. majors have room in their schedules for a second major or two minors, depending on what skills and knowledge they want to gain from the college experience. Use electives intentionally to help support your interests!

2.3 B.S. in Public Health: Four-Year Plan

The B.S. has less flexibility than the B.A. because it includes more science and math coursework. Students should pay close attention to biology, chemistry, math, epidemiology, and biostatistics sequencing.

Year	Fall	Spring
1	PH 001 BIO 011/011L WRI 010 MATH 011	PH 005 BIO 012/012L SPRK 001/SPRK010 Elective or GE
2	PH 010 PH 110 CHEM 002/002L Language GE	PH 100 PH 102 CHEM 010/010L Elective or GE
3	PH 103 PH 105 PH Elective Elective	PH 112 PH 118 PH Elective Elective
4	PH 185 Crossroads GE Elective	PH 181 PH Elective Elective

Advising note: Do not delay science and quantitative courses without talking to an advisor! Delays in math, biology, chemistry, PH 010, or PH 100 may affect later course sequencing and time to degrees.

2.4 B.S. in Public Health, Pre-Med Emphasis: Four-Year Plan

The B.S. Pre-Med Emphasis is the most structured Public Health pathway. It includes the B.S. Public Health core plus additional coursework often expected for medical school or other health professional programs. Students in this emphasis should meet with both major advising and pre-health advising, because completing the Public Health degree is not the same as completing every requirement for every health professional program.

Year	Fall	Spring
1	PH 001 BIO 011/011L WRI 010 MATH 011	PH 005 BIO 012/012L SPRK 001/SPRK010 Elective or GE MED 011 <i>recommended</i>
2	PH 010 PH 110 CHEM 002/002L Language GE	PH 100 PH 102 CHEM 010/010L PHYS 018/018L
3	PH 103 PH 105 CHEM 008/008L PHY 019/019L	PH 112 PH 118 CHEM 100/L PH Elective
4	PH 185 CHEM 111 Elective	PH 181 BIO 161 Elective

Advising note: This plan is crowded! Summer coursework may be useful, especially for GE or language requirements, but students should consult advising before moving science prerequisites out of sequence. Students should also build clinical exposure, service, and shadowing over time rather than waiting until the application year.

2.5 Electives

Electives help students shape the major around their goals. Choose electives that build a recognizable area of strength and give you concrete skills or experiences to discuss in resumes, interviews, graduate applications, and personal statements. Possible elective clusters:

Interest area	Useful elective directions
Health equity and community health	PH 111 Social Epidemiology PH 113 Latino and Immigrant Health PH 114 Migration and Health PH 124 Health Disparities SPAN 107 Spanish for Health Professionals SPAN 177 Sociolinguistics and Latino Health <i>Additional courses in Anthropology, Critical Race & Ethnic Studies, Sociology</i>
Policy and systems	PH 106 Health Policy PH 107H Food Policy & Politics PH 123 Should Drugs be Legal? <i>Additional courses in Political Science and Sociology</i>
Communication and education	PH 104 Health and the Media SPAN 107 Spanish for Health Professionals SPAN 177 Sociolinguistics and Latino Health <i>Additional courses in Communication & Media</i>
Data, methods, and research	PH 111 Social Epidemiology PH 117 Decolonizing Methodologies in Public Health Research PH 115 Geographic Information Systems Mapping for Public Health PH 185 Health and Biomedical Ethics ANTH 171 Introduction to Data Science for Demography <i>Additional courses in Data Science</i>
Environmental and occupational health	PH 117 Research Methods in Public Health: GIS Mapping PH 120 Unintentional and Intentional Injury PH 121 Maternal and Child Health PH 130 Does the Dose Make the Poison? Introduction to Toxicology & Risk Assessment PH 137 Insects and Public Health <i>Additional courses in Environmental Systems</i>
Clinical or pre-health preparation	PH 118 Public Health Nutrition PH 185 Biomedical ethics <i>Additional courses in Neuroscience, Physiology, Genetics</i>

Note. Not all electives are offered every year. Check the Schedule of Courses and consult advising before relying on a specific elective for graduation timing.

2.6 Double Majors, Minors, and Complementary Programs

Some Public Health majors add a minor or second major. This can be useful when the additional program supports a clear academic or professional goal but note that it can also make scheduling more difficult.

Programs that may pair well with Public Health include Spanish, Communication and Media, Sociology, Political Science, Management, Human Biology, Environmental Systems, Cognitive Science, or Critical Race and Ethnic Studies. The best choice depends on the student's goals. For example, a dual Spanish major or minor may support students interested in community health, health communication, clinical care, or work with multilingual populations. Communication and Media may support students interested in pursuing careers in health communication, advocacy, public information, and campaigns.

Students considering a double major or minor should meet with advising early. They should ask whether the added program will affect time to degree, whether courses overlap, whether required courses are offered regularly, and whether summer coursework would be needed

3 Beyond Classes

Use your time at UC Merced to do more than complete required courses! Getting involved in student organizations, research, internships, community-based research or volunteering can help you build skills, prepare for graduate or professional school, and connect what you learn in the classroom to real public health work.

3.1 Department Life

One of the best ways to get the most out of the Public Health major is to participate in Department events outside the classroom. Throughout the year, the Department organizes events designed to help students build community, connect with faculty and graduate students, learn about research and career pathways, and support one another academically and professionally. These events also help students feel more connected to the major and to UC Merced more broadly.

Department events may include:

- Coffee & Cookies with the Faculty
- Study breaks and community-building events
- Guest speakers and seminar series
- Workshops related to graduate school, internships, or career planning
- Research presentations by faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates
- National Public Health Week activities
- Internship and capstone presentations
- Public health advocacy and community engagement events

Students are strongly encouraged to attend events regularly, even early in their time at UC Merced. Faculty and graduate students are more likely to know and mentor students who participate in Department life outside of class. Attending events can also help students learn about research opportunities, internships, conference travel, leadership opportunities, and graduate school pathways that they might not otherwise hear about.

How to find out about these events? Read your emails, especially from publichealth@ucmerced.edu, and follow us on social media: [LinkedIn](#), [Instagram](#), and [TikTok](#).

Remember: college success is only *partly* about coursework! Students who build relationships with peers, faculty, advisors, mentors, and campus programs are better positioned to navigate challenges, ask for help when needed, and take advantage of opportunities as they arise. We encourage you to make use of campus resources related to academic success, writing support, tutoring, wellness, financial support, career planning, and student life throughout your time at UC Merced.

3.2 Student Groups

Student organizations can help students build community, learn from peers, practice leadership, and hear about professional development opportunities. The [Public Health Society](#) is a team of UC Merced undergraduate students who collaborate to expand their understanding of the diverse opportunities within the field of Public Health. Together, they strive to create and access opportunities for learning while exploring the various dimensions and impacts of Public Health on communities. PHS holds twice-monthly meetings, organizes study sessions and professional events, and plans a series of activities and events during April's [National Public Health Week](#) that have been recognized by the American Public Health Association ([APHA](#)). We encourage all majors to check it out and meet fellow students. Even better, help contribute to the success by eventually taking on a leadership role!

3.3 Research

UC Merced is a world-class [research university](#)! In 2025, we earned the highest distinction for doctoral-granting universities, the Carnegie R1 classification. Our faculty and graduate students are busy producing new knowledge across many fields, including public health. We are proud that our research is not separate from undergraduate education: we encourage all undergraduate students to become a part of the research ecosystem by working joining research teams, applying to campus research programs, and developing research projects that connect classroom learning to real public health questions.

Getting hands-on research experience helps students explore public health questions in depth, build relationships with faculty and graduate students, strengthen graduate/professional applications, and develop concrete skills in evidence, data, writing, and presentation. You can seek research opportunities with Public Health faculty and with faculty in other departments or graduate groups whose work connects to public health, such as anthropology, sociology, psychology, environmental systems, biological sciences, political science, or engineering.

Students interested in research should begin by identifying topics that interest them, attending research talks when possible, and speaking with instructors whose courses connect to their interests. But don't worry; you don't need to have everything figured out before looking for research experience! Research tasks for students can include literature reviews, developing surveys, recruiting participants, data entry, coding data, community outreach, or helping to prepare reports and presentations. Over time, students take on more independent work. Many of our undergraduate students help from beginning to end of the research process, from collecting data to helping to write it up for publication.

3.3.1 Campus Research Programs

The Undergraduate Research Opportunities Center ([UROC](#)) is a great resource on campus that helps UC Merced undergraduates develop as researchers. UROC provides information about research opportunities, supports applications for undergraduate research programs, and connects students to structured programs that combine faculty-mentored research with academic and professional development. For example, the [UC LEADS](#) program lasts 2 years, with one summer doing research at UC Merced, and the other summer doing research on another UC campus. There is also the [California Alliance for Minority Participation \(CAMP\)](#). Most programs advertised or organized by UROC have early spring deadlines.

Students can use UROC to learn how undergraduate research works, identify programs that fit their goals, prepare applications, and understand how research experience can support graduate school, professional school, and career development. UROC also maintains a research portal where faculty can post undergraduate research positions and where students can look for opportunities to participate in faculty-mentored research, scholarship, and creative activity.

One major UROC program is the Summer Undergraduate Research Institute ([SURI](#)). SURI is a nine-week summer program that combines hands-on research with structured academic and professional development. Students participate in research with faculty mentors while also building skills related to research practice, professional communication, graduate school preparation, fellowship applications, and responsible research.

3.3.2 Research with Public Health Faculty

Doing research with a faculty member is a great opportunity for all our majors. To find a faculty member with whom to work, we recommend looking at the [faculty research pages](#) to learn about their research areas. After identifying a couple of faculty members whose research interests you, introduce yourself in an email. Ask about research opportunities within their research group (sometimes called a “lab”). You can also ask if they have other undergraduates doing research in the lab to get a peer's perspective on the experience. You can ask to attend a group meeting and/or visit the lab to find out if it would be a good fit. Each lab has its own culture. Some things to consider include whether you're interested in computational or experimental research, or community-engaged, qualitative work. Would you be working

under the supervision of the professor, postdoctoral researcher, or a graduate student? What time commitment is needed to make progress on the project? Does that fit with your course load and schedule? What projects are available? What kind of tasks would you do? What course knowledge or skills are needed?

If you are going to be doing research for credit (PH 095 or 195), you will need to submit an [Independent Study Form](#). Research courses do not show up on the schedule. Note that you don't need to sign up for research credits in order to do research with a faculty member; contact them anytime throughout the year.

Funding is often available to pay you for summer research from the faculty's research grants. Occasionally there may be funding available for academic-year research as well.

3.3.3 Conferences

There are a variety of conferences that you can attend to present a poster or maybe even talk about your research, learn about research, network with others, talk to graduate school representatives, find a peer support group, learn about careers, and engage in professional development. Funding to travel and participate in conferences can be available from campus research organizations like UROC, the faculty research group you work with, or the conference itself.

Some conferences are designed specifically for undergraduate researchers, while others are larger professional meetings where students can attend sessions, volunteer, network, or present research if they have a project ready. Students who want to present should talk with a faculty mentor early, because conference abstracts are often due months before the conference takes place.

Examples of campus opportunities to present your work and to learn about others' research:

- **UC Merced UROC Annual [Summer Symposium](#).** UROC's Summer Symposium gives undergraduate researchers the opportunity to present research conducted with faculty mentors, including through oral and poster presentations.
- **UC Merced Annual [Research Week](#).** Undergraduate students often present during themed poster sessions in the annual Research Week, which highlights research from across campus.
- **Public Health Capstone and Internship Symposium.** Graduating students and those who have completed a Public Health Internship (PH196) present their work at a symposium at the end of the year.

Examples of conferences and presentation venues that may be relevant for Public Health students include:

- **American Public Health Association [Annual Meeting and Expo](#).** APHA's Annual

Meeting is one of the largest public health gatherings, bringing together thousands of public health professionals, students, researchers, practitioners, advocates, and organizations. Many of our faculty and graduates attend every year, and several of our Public Health majors have presented as well. There are student-specific opportunities, including APHA's [Student Assembly](#) and the Delta Omega Student Poster Session.

- **Society for Public Health Education (SOPHE) [Annual Conference](#).** SOPHE is especially relevant for students interested in health education, health, promotion, school health, community health, communication, and public health practice. Its annual conference includes evidence-based practice, skill-building, professional development and networking. SOPHE runs an annual **National Health Education Week** celebration during the third week of October to increase national awareness on major public health issues.
- **Subfield-specific conferences.** Depending on your interests and your faculty mentor's expertise, you may also consider conferences in areas such as epidemiology, health communication, environmental health, health policy, health services research, sociology of health, medical anthropology, or community-based participatory research.
- **SACNAS National Diversity in STEM [Conference](#).** SACNAS is a multidisciplinary STEM conference for students and professionals. It includes research presentations, professional development, mentoring, and a graduate school/career expo. Many faculty and students from across UC Merced attend every year.

Students with research results should ask their faculty mentor which conferences are most appropriate for the topic, stage of the project, and student's goals. A student presenting a first poster may be best served by a campus or undergraduate research symposium. A student with a more developed project may consider APHA, SOPHE, SACNAS, or a subfield-specific professional conference.

3.3.4 Internships and Experiential Learning

Experiential learning gives you the opportunity to apply what you are learning in the classroom to real public health settings. The Department of Public Health has established links to local and regional government and nonprofit agencies working to address public health challenges in the San Joaquín Valley. We offer an internship course (PH_196) by application to qualified students with Junior or Senior standing.

But you don't have to wait for junior year to do an internship! Connect with [Career Services](#) to prepare for an internship, including identifying potential opportunities, getting your application materials together, and preparing for interviews. Many internships are paid but you may also earn course credit by working with a faculty member. Talk with your Academic Advisor and Public Health faculty about how this might work.

All Public Health majors also complete a capstone project in PH 181, in their senior year. PH 181 is our program's culminating experience and an opportunity to engage in and report on public health research, with attention to chronic and infectious illnesses and health challenges facing county and state residents. Students develop a capstone project, work with data sources used by public health researchers, and complete a research poster and final report.

4 Career Planning (and life after UC Merced)

Career planning is important to consider early to help guide your choices while at UC Merced. As discussed above, decisions on what courses to take and how to spend your summers can help you prepare for your next step. Do not wait until your fourth year to explore whether you are preparing for direct employment following UCM, or graduate or professional school.

You should prepare for the next step by researching graduate programs, professional programs, and job opportunities as soon as you begin taking upper-division courses. [Career Services](#) has a number of resources to help you, including dedicated Career Specialists, to help prepare you for the job market. Take a look at our department's [LinkedIn](#) page to connect with our alumni and see the range of positions they hold.

4.1 Certifications and Early Career Credentials

Some Public Health majors also pursue certifications or workforce credentials. These are different from graduate degrees. A certification may help students demonstrate a specific skill set, qualify for certain jobs, or enter the workforce while still in school or shortly after graduation. Students should check current requirements before enrolling in any certification program because eligibility rules can change. Some of the certifications and credentials of interest to Public Health students include:

- **Community Health Worker / Promotor(a).** Community Health Workers (CHW), also known as *promotoras/es*, serve as trusted links between communities and health, social service, or public health systems. They may provide health education, outreach, care coordination, system navigation, informal counseling, social support, and connection to community resources. The state Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) [describes](#) CHW services as preventive health services intended to prevent disease, disability, and other health conditions or their progression and to promote physical and mental health and well-being. In California, community health worker services became a Medi-Cal benefit on July 1, 2022, meaning that Community Health Worker services can now be reimbursed through California's Medicaid program when provided through eligible Medi-Cal providers and organizations. This created new pathways for clinics, health systems, managed care organizations, local health jurisdictions, and community-based organizations to hire and integrate Community Health Workers into preventive care, outreach, care coordination, health education, and

community navigation efforts. CHW/promotora work is not the same as a bachelor's or master's degree pathway. Many CHW/promotora roles are based on community knowledge, lived experience, language skills, cultural connection, and trust, and some positions do not require a college degree.

- For Public Health students, CHW or promotora training can be a strong way to gain **paid, community-facing public health experience while in college** or soon after graduation. Because the San Joaquín Valley has substantial needs in chronic disease prevention, environmental health, immigrant health, maternal and child health, behavioral health, rural health access, and community outreach, CHW/promotora experience may be especially relevant for students who want to work locally.
- California does not have a single state-issued CHW license; one way of earning the license is through **UC Merced's Division of Professional and Continuing Education Community Health Worker Specialized Training**.
- **Certified Health Education Specialist (CHES)**. Students interested in health education, health promotion, community health, outreach, wellness, patient education, or nonprofit/public agency program work may want to explore the national credential of Certified Health Education Specialist, earned by passing an exam. **Eligibility** for the CHES exam generally requires at least 25 semester credits, or 37 quarter hours, of coursework related to the Eight Areas of Responsibility and Competencies for Health Education Specialists, with grades of C or better. The Public Health B.A. and B.S. include substantial coursework relevant to CHES preparation. However, eligibility is determined by NCHEC, not by UC Merced, so students should review current CHES eligibility requirements before applying. CHES may strengthen applications for some health education and health promotion positions.

4.2 Graduate and Professional School

Many Public Health majors, like UC Merced students in general, seek advanced degrees. Graduate and professional training can help students develop specialized expertise, qualify for licensed professions, move into leadership roles, or prepare for research, policy, clinical, or administrative careers. Students should begin exploring options early, because different pathways require different coursework, experiences, exams, application timelines, and letters of recommendation.

Graduate and professional programs generally look for evidence that students are prepared for the field they are entering. This may include strong grades in relevant coursework, research experience, internship or volunteer experience, leadership, community engagement, professional maturity and strong writing skills. Some programs also require standardized

tests, prerequisite courses, or documented clinical or professional experience. Requirements vary by program, so students should always review the expectations for the specific schools and programs to which they plan to apply.

4.2.1 Master's and Professional Degrees

Many students pursue terminal master's degrees, meaning degrees designed to prepare graduates for professional practice rather than serving as a step toward a doctoral degree. These programs can be useful for students who want applied training, a clearer professional specialization, stronger credentials for the job market, or preparation for leadership roles in public health, policy, healthcare, nonprofit, or government settings.

Common **professional degrees** our majors pursue after graduation include:

- **Master of Public Health (MPH).** The MPH is a practice-oriented graduate degree in public health. MPH programs often prepare students for work in public health departments, community-based organizations, nonprofit organizations, health systems, advocacy organizations, research centers, and government agencies. Common areas of concentration include epidemiology, biostatistics, health policy, health promotion, community health, environmental health, global health, and health services. MPH programs typically value relevant public health experience, public health coursework, evidence of commitment to population health, strong writing, and clear professional goals.
- **Master of Science in Public Health (MSPH) or related M.S. degrees.** The MSPH and related M.S. degrees are often more research- or methods-oriented than the MPH. These degrees may be a good fit for students interested in epidemiology, biostatistics, environmental health, health services research, data analysis, implementation science, or preparation for doctoral study. Quantitative preparation, research experience, strong faculty letters, and a clear research interest may be especially important. Some students earn an MSPH or related M.S. degree before applying to a Ph.D.; others enter doctoral programs directly from the bachelor's degree.
- **Master of Public Policy (MPP) or Master of Public Administration (MPA).** MPP and MPA programs may be of interest to students interested in health policy, public administration, government, nonprofit management, program evaluation, budgeting, regulation, or systems-level change. These programs often look for strong writing, quantitative reasoning, policy or public service experience, leadership, and evidence that the applicant understands public problems and institutional decision-making. Useful preparation may include coursework in statistics, economics, policy, political science, public health, sociology, or related fields; internships in government or nonprofit settings; and experience with writing, analysis, and community-facing work.

- **Master of Social Work (MSW).** The MSW may be a good fit for Public Health students interested in social services, behavioral health, case management, community practice, child and family services, aging, housing, immigration, substance use, violence prevention, schools, hospitals, or clinical social work. MSW programs differ in whether they emphasize clinical practice, macro practice, policy, administration, or community organizing. Students interested in licensed clinical social work should review each program's field placement structure and state licensure pathways, because licensure requirements are separate from completing the degree.
- **Clinical Health Professional Degrees: Medicine, Nursing, Dentistry, Veterinary Medicine, Pharmacy, Physical Therapy, Physician Assistant, and related fields.** Students interested in clinical or patient care programs need to plan early. These programs often require specific prerequisite courses in biology, chemistry, and mathematics, and standardized tests prior to admission. Students considering health professional programs should seek pre-health advising in addition to major advising. *Academic advising* helps students complete the Public Health degree; *pre-health advising* helps students plan for the additional expectations of clinical and licensed professional programs.

4.2.2 Doctoral Degrees

Some Public Health majors pursue doctoral study. Doctoral programs (resulting in a doctorate, or doctoral degree) are usually designed for students who want to conduct advanced research, teach at the university level, lead public health organizations, design and evaluate programs, or develop specialized expertise in a field.

- **Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.).** The Ph.D. is a research doctorate. *Fun fact: all of your faculty members earned a Ph.D.!* In public health and related fields, Ph.D. students are trained to produce original research, contribute to scientific knowledge, and often prepare for careers in academia, research institutes, government agencies, policy organizations, health systems, or industry. Ph.D. programs usually require a strong academic record, research experience, strong letters of recommendation, a clear statement of research interests, and a good fit with faculty expertise. Many Ph.D. programs provide funding through fellowships, teaching assistantships, or research assistantships, though funding structures vary by field, program, and institution. Students should ask directly whether admitted students are funded, for how many years, and through what mechanism.
- **Doctor of Public Health (Dr.P.H.).** The Dr.P.H. is a professional doctorate in public health. It is typically designed for people who want advanced leadership roles in public health practice, policy, health systems, government, nonprofits, or applied public health organizations. Compared with the Ph.D., the Dr.P.H. usually places more emphasis on leadership, management, applied practice, implementation, and systems change. Many Dr.P.H. programs expect applicants to already have an MPH

or another relevant graduate degree and significant professional experience.

4.2.3 Planning Timeline for Graduate Study

Students should begin exploring graduate and professional options by the third year, and earlier if they are considering a highly sequenced pre-health pathway. Like college applications, many graduate applications are due in the fall or winter before the intended year of enrollment (e.g., December 2027 for admission in August 2028), although timelines vary by field and program.

Health professional programs often require an even longer planning horizon because they may need to complete prerequisites, prepare for standardized exams, secure clinical or volunteer experience, and request letters well before applications open. Students should make a list of programs, compare requirements, and work backward from application timelines.

Students preparing for graduate or professional school should prioritize experiences that help them clarify their roles and demonstrate that preparation. These may include research with faculty, internships (e.g., PH196), community-based experience, part-time jobs in public health, conference presentations, or substantial writing projects. The best preparation depends on the degree being pursued: research experience is especially important for research-oriented master's and Ph.D. programs; practice and leadership experience are especially important for MPH, MPA, MPP, and Dr.P.H. programs; and clinical exposure is essential for most health professional pathways.

Expect to apply to multiple programs. Choosing where to apply is an important part of the process. You should consider the kind of training you want, the fields or concentrations available, the faculty or research areas represented in the program, and the kinds of careers graduates pursue. Logistics are also important! Consider: the location, program size, internship or practicum requirements, and likelihood of admission. And don't forget the financials: While master's programs often charge hefty tuition, most doctoral programs pay YOU to attend. These are all good topics to talk about with Public Health faculty during office hours. You should also explore web pages of graduate programs, check out the information at [Grad School Shopper](#), or ask some of the graduate students in our department.

Talk with academic advisors, pre-health advisors if relevant, alumni, internship supervisors, and professionals working in the fields you are considering. Take a look at some of the [information and advice](#) provided from our own PhD program. You are welcome to apply to our own program if it fits your goals, but even students who plan to apply elsewhere can use the information to understand how doctoral programs describe research fit, faculty mentoring, funding, and preparation for advanced public health research.

4.3 Employment

Public Health employment does not always have the words “public health” in the job title. Our graduates work across many kinds of organizations because population health work happens in government agencies, community organizations, health systems, research settings, advocacy groups, schools, workplaces, and private organizations.

Students interested in government work may find opportunities in local and state agencies such as county public health departments, California Department of Public Health, environmental health departments, health and human services agencies, emergency preparedness offices, Medicaid/Medi-Cal programs, and city or county planning departments. Possible roles include health program coordinator, community health worker, epidemiology assistant, health education specialist, public health analyst, program assistant, outreach coordinator, or emergency preparedness assistant.

Community-based organizations and nonprofit agencies also do substantial public health work. These organizations may focus on food access, immigrant health, maternal and child health, mental health, housing, environmental justice, health education, violence prevention, substance use prevention, or chronic disease prevention. Public Health graduates might coordinate programs, conduct outreach, support grant writing, organize community events, collect and summarize data, prepare reports, assist with evaluation, or communicate with community partners.

Health care systems and clinics also hire students with public health training, especially for work that connects patients, providers, and communities. Graduates may work in patient navigation, care coordination, health education, community outreach, quality improvement, population health management, health communication, or program support. These roles often focus on helping people access services, understand health information, participate in prevention programs, or connect with community resources.

Research centers, universities, consulting firms, and evaluation organizations may hire Public Health graduates as research assistants, project coordinators, data assistants, survey coordinators, evaluation assistants, or program analysts. These positions may involve literature reviews, participant recruitment, survey administration, interviews, data cleaning, data visualization, report writing, or program evaluation. Students interested in these roles should build experience with research methods, statistics, data interpretation, writing, and ethical research practices.

Advocacy and policy organizations also employ Public Health graduates. These organizations may work on health equity, environmental justice, reproductive health, food policy, immigrant health, tobacco control, climate and health, housing, labor conditions, or health care access. Entry-level roles may include policy assistant, advocacy coordinator, communications assistant, campaign organizer, legislative aide, or community engagement coordinator. These jobs often require strong writing, public communication, policy analysis, coalition-building, and the ability to translate evidence for non-specialist audiences.

Another important dimension of Public Health is Environmental Health, which focuses on how physical, chemical, biological, and built environments affect human health. This can include air and water quality, food safety, housing conditions, toxic exposures, climate-related hazards, sanitation, vector control, and environmental justice. Graduates interested in environmental health may work with county environmental health departments, community organizations, regulatory agencies, environmental justice groups, or research projects. Some specialized environmental health roles may require additional science coursework, certifications, or graduate training.

Often closely related to Environmental Health is Occupational Health and Safety, which focuses on health and safety in workplaces. This includes injury prevention, workplace exposures, ergonomics, infectious disease prevention, heat illness, labor conditions, workplace stress, and safety regulation. Public Health graduates may find entry-level work in workplace wellness, safety training, workers' compensation support, occupational health research, employee health programs, or public agencies concerned with workplace safety. More specialized roles in industrial hygiene, occupational epidemiology, or occupational medicine usually require additional graduate or professional training.

The major prepares students for this range of pathways by building transferable public health skills: interpreting data, communicating clearly, understanding health inequities, designing and assessing programs, analyzing policy, working with communities, and thinking ethically about public health problems. Course projects, PH 181, internships such as PH 196, research with faculty, campus employment, volunteer work, and student leadership can all become concrete examples for resumes, cover letters, interviews, and graduate applications. Students should **keep copies of strong papers, posters, presentations, and policy briefs** so they can describe their skills clearly, and submit examples, when applying for jobs.

For general career information, students should consult APHA's Public Health [CareerMart](#), CDC student and recent graduate [career pathways](#), and [PublicHealthCareers.org](#). These resources can help students learn about public health job titles, internships, fellowships, job-search strategies, and early-career pathways in government, nonprofit, research, and community settings. Students should work with the UC Merced Student [Career Services](#) to develop resumes, cover letters, interview skills, and job search strategies tailored to their interests.

5 Administrative Notes

General Catalog A student is subject to the policies in the in effect when they initially enroll. Through that link, you can access the current and archived copies of the UC Merced Academic [Catalog](#). Students may also petition to adopt the policies in a newer catalog. *If possible, we recommend that students adopt changes made to the Public Health program, but:* consult advising before changing catalog year because changes can affect major, School, GE, and graduation requirements.

Requirements for the Public Health Major The requirements for the major (BA, BS, BS-Pre-med) are listed in the UC Merced Academic [Catalog](#). Courses in the major must be taken for a letter grade unless the course is only offered on a pass/no pass basis.

Normal Progress to Degree UC Merced undergraduate degree programs are designed to be completed in eight semesters or four academic years. (Summer terms are not included in the semester count.) To meet the normal progress requirement, undergraduate students are expected to enroll in and pass an average of 15 units per semester, completing the 120 units necessary for graduation in four years. An extension of enrollment beyond nine semesters requires the approval of the student's School.