



**UNIVERSITY OF
GEORGIA**

College of Public Health

Health Policy & Management

*Doctor of Public Health -
Gwinnett Campus*

**DrPH Dissertation Guide
2024-2025**

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UGA Doctor of Public Health Program Dissertation Guide

The University of Georgia Doctor of Public Health integrates foundational knowledge, such as public health theories and methods; competencies of leadership, management, communication, and innovation to enable change and field engagements to translate knowledge into practice. The UGA culminating experience will provide the candidate with an opportunity to practice and develop their personal leadership skills while engaging in a project that contributes substantively to public health. The dissertation is expected to analyze and propose solutions to health policy, management or leadership issues by applying new theoretical or analytic approaches to current problems in health care.

Each candidate will prepare a dissertation demonstrating the ability to analyze and solve complex, practice-based problems in public health policy, management, and leadership. The dissertation should reflect a variety of perspectives needed to meet major public health challenges and should include explicit solutions, strategies, and implications for high-level public health and health care leadership officials. Thus, an acceptable DrPH dissertation will:

- Address a complex public health problem of strategic importance to public health;
- Advance or contribute to the evidence base of public health practice;
- Utilize an explicit methodology and study design that is clearly specified and designed to address the problem selected for investigation, as effectively addressing complex problems often requires an integration of analytic methods;
- Draw upon and be grounded in both the scholarly and practice literature in an effort to establish a conceptual framework for the dissertation;
- Contain clear public health leadership implications;
- Must be publishable findings or research.

Course Registration During Candidacy

Each semester a candidate may register for HPAM 9300: Doctoral Dissertation. During this time, students will:

- Write their dissertation under the direction of the major professor
- Independently research and prepare for the doctoral dissertation
- Register for credit hours that are variable from 1 to 12 hours
- Be assessed by the Major Professor/Dissertation Chair/Research Advisor using the grading system (Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory)

It is expected that the candidate and Dissertation Chair will be in touch regularly, more than once a semester. It is expected that students set up regular meeting times with their chair-such as bi-weekly or once/month-to check in and report on progress (This is a minimum requirement).

The dissertation Chair will assess the student's performance and progress on the dissertation each semester. Should the dissertation Chair determine that sufficient progress has not been made, a grade of "U" (unsatisfactory) may be assigned. Failure to provide progress reports to the dissertation chair and program director or repeated failure to make sufficient progress (two (2) Unsatisfactory grades in HPAM 9300) will result in dismissal from the program. In the event that a student's performance in the program leads to academic ineligibility to continue, the student must follow reinstatement procedures.

Progress Report for Students Enrolled in Dissertation Hours (HPAM 9300)

Students registered for HPAM 9300 must complete a progress report and submit it to their dissertation chair and the DrPH Program Coordinator at the end of each semester they are enrolled in HPAM 9300. It is the student's responsibility to keep their dissertation chair and the DrPH Program Coordinator informed of their progress and any situations that cause deviations from their dissertation timeline. Students must complete the DrPH Dissertation Progress Report Form before being cleared to register for the next semester. Reports are due during the final examination period each semester. See Appendix.

Time Limit in Doctoral Candidacy

The dissertation must be completed within five years following admission to candidacy to qualify for graduation. It is expected that the scope of the dissertation should allow completion within three or fewer semesters.

Dissertation Format

HPAM DrPH dissertations may take one of two formats, the traditional dissertation monograph or a series of related publication-ready manuscripts. The choice of the format lies with the student and his or her dissertation advisor. All students must prepare the first three sections (Abstract, Introduction and Background, and Literature Review) in the outline below. The format of the manuscripts will be determined mainly by the nature of the public health problem addressed.

- Dissertation Monograph:
 - **Abstract**
 - **Chapter One: Introduction and Background**
 - A statement of the topic to be examined and its importance.
 - **Chapter Two: Literature Review**
 - A thorough review of all literature pertinent to the topic in question. The literature should be focused on developing the specific hypotheses to be tested through the student's research, and the chapter should end by stating the hypotheses in a testable form. For the DrPH degree, hypotheses may pertain to a public health program being evaluated.
 - **Chapter Three: Methods**
 - A complete outline of all methods to be used in carrying out the proposed research including study design and data sources. At a minimum, variables must be defined, and analytic techniques specified for each hypothesis. DrPH students must specify specific methods appropriate for program evaluation.
 - **Chapter Four: Results**
 - A presentation of the results of the research. Ideally, this presentation is organized by hypothesis.
 - **Chapter Five: Conclusions, Recommendations, Public Health Implications**
 - A summary of the implications of the research and recommendations for continuation of the research by future investigators. DrPH students must state implications of their findings for public health practice.

- Dissertation Publication-Option:
 - **Abstract**
 - **Chapter One: Introduction and Background**
 - A statement of the topic to be examined and its importance.
 - **Chapter Two: Literature Review**
 - A thorough review of all literature pertinent to the topic in question. The literature should be focused on developing the specific hypotheses to be tested through the student's research, and the chapter should end by

stating the hypotheses in a testable form. For the DrPH degree, hypotheses may pertain to a public health program being evaluated.

- **Chapter Three: Manuscript 1**
 - Should include Specific Methods, Results, and Conclusions
- **Chapter Four: Manuscript 2**
 - Should include Specific Methods, Results, and Conclusions
- **Chapter Five: Discussions, Conclusions, Recommendations, Public Health Implications**
 - Overall discussion, conclusions, limitations, and recommendations based on the two manuscripts and the overall dissertation topic.
 - A summary of the implications of the research and recommendations for continuation of the research by future investigators. DrPH students must state implications of their findings for public health practice.

As noted, students choosing this option will be required to complete the first three chapters of the dissertation. When submitting the final draft, the usual concluding chapters (“Results” and “Conclusions and Recommendations”) will be replaced with two or more manuscripts. Following Graduate School guidelines for a manuscript format dissertation, a final chapter will be added that ties together the findings and implications of the two papers. Manuscript topics will have been agreed upon as part of the dissertation proposal. All materials must be reviewed and approved by the Dissertation Committee and the Dissertation Chair, as with a formally structured dissertation.

Appropriate dissertation formats for the publication-ready manuscripts may include:

- Case studies and policy, management, and leadership analyses;
- Development of new practice interventions;
- Design and implementation of public health programs;
- Program or policy evaluations;
- Historical program or policy analyses;
- Substantial legislative proposals.

Authorship

Students who choose the publication option should discuss the author list with the dissertation committee chair, members and others, as appropriate, if the student decides to submit one or more of the dissertation papers for publication. According to the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors, “to be listed as an author, each researcher must have been involved in designing the project, collecting data or analyzing the results; must have participated in drafting or revising the manuscript; and must have approved the final, published paper.” Works published or submitted for publication **before the first formation of the student’s dissertation committee** cannot be included as part of the dissertation.

UGA DrPH Program encourages the student and dissertation chair to discuss and reach an understanding on the following topics. Other topics relevant to the student's research should also be discussed at this time. The student should document the discussion and the agreed publication plan and share them with dissertation chair for record.

1. Plans for formal copyrighting the thesis/dissertation;
2. Ownership of the data to be used by the student, if applicable;
3. Plans for publication of the results of the thesis/dissertation;
4. Where co-authorship is appropriate, discuss how the order of authors on the paper will be decided with special attention to first author, corresponding author, and senior author positions;
5. Timelines for publication of the manuscripts;
6. Agreement concerning student- or faculty-initiated publication, and contingencies if the faculty member or student chooses not to publish the results of the study; and,
7. If applicable, appropriate norms regarding publication and authorship as laid out in the relevant scientific discipline publication manuals and journal where publication may be considered. For example, some journals have strict policies regarding the roles for authors that could be included in the committee's discussion.

Data for Doctoral Dissertation

The Doctor of Public Health dissertation could be based on primary data collection by the student. Use of secondary data for Doctor of Public Health dissertation is acceptable pending approval by the Dissertation Chair/Research Advisor and Doctor of Public Health Program Coordinator. If needed, the major professor/dissertation committee will ask the student to get IRB approval for the data.

Primary DrPH Dissertation Activities

1. Doctoral Concept Paper and Committee Recruitment

To expedite effective proposal development and review, candidates are advised to use the following structured guide when developing the concept paper for their proposals:

- **Title**
 - a. A carefully considered, precise title that succinctly indicates the nature and direction of the project.
- **Problem Statement**
 - a. Statement of the Problem which describes the nature and history of the problem or issue being studied and the potential significance of the proposed research and the relevance to public health. The statement should answer the question: How is this topic and approach to the research significant and/or original?
- **Importance of Research Proposed, Purpose**
 - a. Explain how the proposed research meets the requirements for originality in producing what is expected to be a significant contribution to health services research.
 - b. Students should describe the DrPH competencies being addressed in the dissertation process.
- **Project Goals and Objective(s)**
 - a. Describe the general nature of expected or possible outcomes in measurable terms.
- **Setting/Participants**
 - a. Describe site(s) of research with all relevant details. Then identify the subjects and other participants who are the object of the research, likely to be affected by its outcome, or connected to it.
- **Research Design, Statistical Applications, & Main Outcome Measures**
 - a. Explain the relevance of the research design and statistical applications and packages to conduct the research. Then identify the proposed outcome measures with an appropriate rationale.
- **Ethical Procedures, Approval, Institutional Review Board (IRB)**
 - a. While it is not appropriate to have obtained IRB clearance before final approval of the research proposal, students should indicate knowledge of ethical issues that may affect their planned research (subject protection, data protection, etc.) at the concept stage. UGA Human Research Protection Program is available at <https://research.uga.edu/hrpp/eresearch-portal-irb/>

- **Tentative Outline**
- **References**

2. Doctor of Public Health Proposal and Proposal Defense

The dissertation proposal should provide a clear and thorough plan of the proposed research. Ideally, the proposal includes the first three chapters of what will become the dissertation. The three chapters are: **Chapter 1: Introduction and Background; Chapter 2: Literature Review; Chapter 3: Methods**. The proposal defense can be arranged by the candidate and the committee and will be documented by the Program – refer to the Proposal Defense Form on eLC DrPH Dashboard.

Generally, the dissertation proposal includes:

- **Title**
 - A carefully considered, precise title that succinctly indicates the nature and direction of the project
- **Abstract**
- **Problem Statement**
 - Statement of the Problem which describes the nature and history of the problem or issue being studied and the potential significance of the proposed research and the relevance to public health. The statement should answer the question: How is this topic and approach to the research significant and/or original?
- **Chapter 1: Background and Introduction**
- **Chapter 2: Literature Review**
 - Details prior research in this area and provides a historical and conceptual framework. The review includes relevant literature.
- **Chapter 3: Research Methods or Manuscript 1 Draft**
 - Research methods, with clear, concise and specific details explaining the research question and/or hypotheses, methods, design, human subjects review, and limitations of the dissertation research. The methods section of the proposal describes the tools that will be used in the research, the data sources and analytical plan. The data analysis plan provides a detailed discussion about how the data will be managed and analyzed to address the research question(s). This should include an overview of the timetable for the project.
- **Chapter 4: Outline of Results Section or Draft of Manuscript 2**

- A statement of the expected contributions and a discussion of the limitations of the research.
- **Chapter 5: Outline of Discussions, Conclusions, Recommendations and Public Health Implications**
 - Overall discussion, conclusions, limitations and recommendations based on the two manuscripts and the overall dissertation topic.
 - A summary of the implications of the research and recommendations for continuation of the research by future investigators. DrPH students must state the implications of their findings for public health practice.
- **References**
- **Timeline**
 - An anticipated timetable that accounts for all phases of the dissertation research, a discussion of potential challenges to meeting that timetable and ways to address the challenges.

3. Doctor of Public Health Final Defense

Candidates must be registered during the semester they defend. If the student plans to defend during the summer, he or she must be registered for dissertation credit hours during the summer session.

- For all dissertations, the committee should be able to answer relevant questions about the dissertation, such as:
 - **Overall Dissertation Evaluation Criteria:**
 - Considered as a whole, is the dissertation, its methods and findings, significant and innovative?
 - Is the literature review thorough and applicable, and has it been synthesized effectively?
 - Are relevant leadership and/or management theories cited and explained?
 - Are the competencies identified in the student's dissertation concept paper adequately addressed?
 - **Needs or Problem Statement:**
 - Is the need for the project clearly identified?
 - **Goals and Evaluation Criteria:**

- Does the dissertation include a description of policy goals and relevant evaluation measures (e.g., cost, resources needed to implement, feasibility of implementation, political feasibility)?
- **Data or Policy Analysis:**
 - Have appropriate research and data analysis methods been employed? (For example, has the student used appropriate quantitative, qualitative, or policy analysis methods to evaluate competing options?)
 - Does the project describe how populations and communities will be affected by the change? Are the pros and cons in terms of effect on populations thoroughly analyzed?
 - Are considerations of the ethical implications of the change adequate and appropriate?
- **Recommendations:**
 - Are the recommendations reasonable and based in the research findings?
 - Are the recommendations likely to lead to health improvements?
- **Implementation Plan (“Plan for Change”)/Translation of Research into Practice:**
 - What resources (financial, human and other) are/were needed to implement and maintain the change?
 - Has the student grounded their plan for change in an appropriate change framework?
 - Have the effects of the laws and policies that bear on this issue been adequately addressed?
 - Are/Were the relevant policy makers and stakeholders identified? What are/were their positions? Has the student described the plan to obtain stakeholder support and/or reduce stakeholder opposition?
 - Is/Was the proposed schedule for the plan for change realistic? Does/Did it make sense in the context of the project’s budget and resources?
 - Have the appropriate policy analyses, social forecasts, assessments, negotiations, communications, and other application methods been identified and integrated appropriately into the plan?
 - Does the student effectively communicate how the research can be translated into practice or implementation into the field of public health?

NOTE: Most students are not able to implement their plan for change before they defend their dissertation. Thus, the dissertation committee members must assess the potential “real world” utility of the plan for change, and whether it can be implemented in the future.

Doctor of Public Health Defense Procedures

Dissertation Chairs have some leeway in the actual format of the final oral defense. However, the following process is typical:

Doctoral Defenses—Procedures

1. Convene the defense with introductions (as needed), greetings/welcome, and procedure/plan for the proposal or final defense.
2. Hold optional closed Executive Session of Committee to clarify any remaining initial concerns before commencing defense.
3. Candidate’s presentation, 30-40 minutes. Questions from the Committee/audience should be held to the end, unless for clarification only.
4. Committee members should be provided with copies of any slides; three – per page and black and white only are generally acceptable.
5. Question to Candidate first from Committee, then the audience, or
6. Questions to Candidate first from the audience, then from Committee, either in (a) open or (b) closed session.
7. The Candidate will be excused from the room following questions.
8. Hold closed Executive Session of Committee to discuss the dissertation and the defense, additional requirements, if any, and outcome.
9. Invite the Candidate back into the meeting and brief on the outcome.
10. If successful defense, obtain signatures on Doctoral Dissertation Completion Form and Dissertation Cover Sheets (the student is responsible for working with the DrPH Program Coordinator and ensuring that the Chair and committee have the proper dissertation forms to sign).
11. Detailed feedback by Dissertation Committee Chair immediately, or within 1-2 days, regarding any corrections, necessary changes, elaborations, and any additional work required for the dissertation.
12. Assure that the Committee delegates authority to the Chair to determine whether or not the necessary revisions are successfully completed.

Please note that the Graduate School has delegated the authority to approve virtual/hybrid defenses to the Department and Program. Students should consult with the DrPH Program Coordinator regarding allowable format of dissertation defense. With approval, students are responsible to work with their dissertation chair to set up virtual meetings.

Doctoral Committee Member Responsibilities

I. Doctoral Candidate Responsibilities:

1. Meet regularly with Dissertation Chair/Major Professor and committee members.
2. Complete and submit drafts and other research activities in a timely manner to the Chair and committee members.
3. Complete and submit HPAM 9300 Progress Report at the end of each semester. Submit reports to Dissertation Chair and Doctor of Public Health Program Coordinator.
4. Schedule dissertation proposal and defense meetings with Chair and committee.
5. Notify the DrPH Program Coordinator and DrPH Academic Support of the Doctoral Defense date (a minimum of 2 weeks prior to the scheduled date).
6. Submit Final Program of Study and Request for Transfer Credit (if applicable) forms.
7. Complete Final Approval Defense Form. Note: Signatures are required from all voting members through gradstatus.uga.edu.
8. Submit the final written dissertation to the University of Georgia Graduate School and the Doctor of Public Health Program Coordinator after appropriate edits have been made.
9. Attend commencement exercises (optional).

II. Dissertation Chair Responsibilities:

1. Meet regularly with the doctoral candidate to discuss and advise the doctoral research.
2. Set deadlines for drafts, research activities and defense meetings.
3. Recommend and approve committee members and subject matter experts. Assist with letters of justification for outside members.
4. Evaluate the candidate dissertation progress each semester and assign a grade for HPAM 9300. Send verification of receipt and approval to the Doctor of Public Health Program Coordinator.
5. Run proposal defense efficiently, fairly, and comprehensively.
6. Review all drafts and provide written feedback.
7. Assure that all Committee members are on board ahead of the final defense. If a favorable outcome, albeit with minor changes or elaborations, is not a forgone conclusion, then do not hold defense.
8. Run final dissertation defense efficiently, fairly, and comprehensively.
9. Take notes during the defense of all Committee member (and audience) questions in order to provide feedback to the Candidate. This is particularly important regarding corrections, changes, elaborations, and any additional work required.
10. Ensure student has addressed any committee concerns, changes, corrections or additional work to the dissertation before final submission of the document to the University of Georgia Graduate School.

11. Sign the Final Defense Approval Form via gradstatus.uga.edu (G164).
12. Celebrate completion and congratulate the candidate on the completion of their doctoral studies! Attend commencement exercises if the candidate is participating.

III. Faculty Committee Member Responsibilities:

1. Attend all committee meetings scheduled during the proposal and dissertation writing stage;
2. Attend concept paper, proposal and dissertation defense meetings;
3. Read, review and provide written feedback on dissertation drafts and during committee meetings with the Candidate;
4. Advise the Candidate on specific components of research based on subject matter expertise; and
5. Sign the Final Defense Approval Form via gradstatus.uga.edu (G164).

IV. Outside Practitioner Committee Member Responsibilities:

1. Provide updated CV to the Candidate, dissertation chair, and DrPH Program Coordinator for Advisory Committee Form Submission;
2. Attend concept paper, proposal, and dissertation defense meetings;
3. Read, review and provide written feedback on dissertation drafts;
4. Provide feedback during committee meetings with the Candidate;
5. Advise candidate on specific components of research based on subject matter expertise; and
6. Sign the Final Defense Approval Form via gradstatus.uga.edu (G164).

V. Doctor of Public Health Program Coordinator Responsibilities:

1. Submit Doctoral Advisory Committee Form and Letter of Justification for the outside practitioner.
2. Review HPAM 9300 Progress Report and clear candidate for registration each semester.
3. Advise students on doctoral dissertation policies and procedures.
4. Schedule and advertise the Dissertation Final Defense.
5. Sign and/or submit the Final Defense Approval Form (G164).
6. Ensure all other student requirements have been fulfilled.
7. Attend commencement exercises.

APPENDIX A: Sample Letter of Justification for Outside Practitioner

November 9, 2019

The Graduate School
Athens, GA

Dear Graduate School Dean,

Please accept this letter of justification on behalf of Dr. Jane Doe, MD, MHS. Dr. Doe has agreed to serve as an external doctoral committee member for John Smith, Doctor of Public Health candidate in the College of Public Health. Dr. Doe is a practicing emergency room clinician and subject matter expert in disease epidemiology, currently working at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Mr. Smith's dissertation topic, "Clinical evidence, cost, and public health implications for communities," requires a sound understanding of disease epidemiology and clinical implications. Dr. Doe will provide medical expertise in understanding the clinical impact of the disease and will help interpret data from clinical chart reviews serving as the primary information for the dissertation.

Dr. Doe serves as the epidemiology team lead for the Disease Epidemiology Branch (DEB) at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and is a part-time emergency room provider at Medical X Center in Atlanta, GA. As the epidemiology team lead and clinical consultant for DEB, Dr. Doe serves as a subject matter expert in the epidemiology, clinical diagnosis, treatment and management of diseases and other infections. She serves as the co-principal investigator on the study of long-term diseases (with Mr. Smith) and has authored numerous publications on disease and reference documents to support the training of healthcare providers. Dr. Doe obtained her Doctor of Medicine degree from the University School of Medicine, her Master of Health Sciences from the School of Public Health, and is Board Certified in Emergency Medicine.

Dr. Doe will meet with Mr. Smith's doctoral committee and will attend the proposal and dissertation defense presentations. She will read, review and provide critical feedback on dissertation drafts during committee meetings and directly to Mr. Smith. Dr. Doe will draw from her vast experience as an infectious disease epidemiologist, front line provider, and disease subject matter expert to help guide the candidate in developing this doctoral research study.

Dr. Doe's current curriculum vitae (CV) is attached. Please let us know if you require any further documentation in support of this request for Dr. Doe to serve on the doctoral committee for Mr. John Smith.

Doctor of Public Health Program Coordinator

Health Policy and Management Graduate Coordinator

APPENDIX B: Sample Doctor of Public Health Dissertation Progress Report

HPAM 9300: Doctoral Research

(This form may be available in an electronic form)

Student Information

Student Name:

Current Semester/Year:

Semester/Year Candidacy Began:

Dissertation Committee Information

Research Advisor (Dissertation Chair): _____

Committee Member 2 (UGA Faculty): _____

Committee Member 3 (Outside Practitioner): _____

Dissertation Information

Working Dissertation Title: _____

Date of Dissertation Proposal Defense: _____

Date of Dissertation Defense: _____

Progress Report

Please attach a 2-page description of the current status of your dissertation on the basis of a recent discussion with your Research Advisor about your progress.

This brief report should describe:

1. The progress you have made in relation to your original research proposal.
2. The progress you have made since you completed your previous progress report
3. An outline of work remaining to be done to complete the dissertation

Student Signature

Date

Research Advisor Signature

Date

DrPH Program Coordinator Signature

Date

APPENDIX C: Doctor of Public Health Important Dates and Deadlines

Dissertation Defense and Graduation Checklist

The deadlines established by the Graduate School for defense graduation can be found here:

<http://grad.uga.edu/index.php/current-students/important-dates-deadlines/>.

- **The semester before you intend to graduate:** Complete your proposal defense.
- **By the end of the first week of the semester you intend to graduate:** Complete the survey at https://ugeorgia.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_dncUFQIrBYB02mq. If you have any questions about where you stand on readiness for Graduation, contact DrPH Program Coordinator.
- **Deadline set by the Graduate School: Final date to submit Program of Study forms and submit Application for Graduation** to the Graduate School for graduation.
<https://gradstatus.uga.edu/Forms/G138> (Note an approved Advisory Committee form for all doctoral Candidates must be on file with the Graduate School) **Application for Graduation is done through Athena** (<https://athena.uga.edu/>).
- **Deadline set by the Graduate School: If you have not been admitted into the Candidacy,** complete and submit “**Application for Admission to Candidacy for Doctoral Degrees**” <https://gradstatus.uga.edu/Forms/G162>.
- **Deadline set by the Graduate School: Final date for submitting one complete copy of the dissertation for a format check** to the Graduate School for graduation. <http://grad.uga.edu/index.php/current-students/policies-procedures/theses-dissertations-guidelines/format-check/>.
- **A minimum of 2 weeks prior to the Defense date:** Schedule Dissertation Defense with the DrPH Program Coordinator and Graduate School (email Program Coordinator and copy DrPH Academic Support , HPAM Department Head (Dr. Khan), and Dissertation Committee Chair)
- **Ten days before the Graduate School deadline for receiving the final defense approval form** (if it falls on a weekend, use the prior Friday): **Final Date of Dissertation Defense for graduation in the semester**
- **Deadline set by the Graduate School:**
 - **Final Defense Approval Form (G164);**
 - **Final corrected (Electronic Theses and Dissertations) ETD (G129)** for graduation **MUST** have been received by the Graduate School: http://grad.uga.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/body_appphddis.pdf.
- **Deadline set by the Graduate School: Final date for doctoral students to submit information for Commencement program for graduation.** <https://gradstatus.uga.edu/Forms/G120>. (Students who placed a FERPA restriction on their official record will not have their name appear on any printed information related to Graduation, including the Dissertation Defense announcement and the Graduation Program at Commencement, publicity via newspaper and/or internet to their community, etc. The FERPA restriction must be removed by the student for graduation announcements.

Please note, when submitting your forms on gradstatus.uga.edu, use “Health Policy & Management” as your Department, and “Public Health – DrPH” as your Major/Degree.