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CONNECTIONS

Issue Topic:

VOLUME 5: ISSUE 2

Studying Public Health in the USA



CONNECTIONS

In This Issue:

VOLUME 5: ISSUE 2: APRIL 2011

Studying Public Health in the USA

Note from the Editor:

Public health is an inherently international discipline with a wide array of degrees and concentrations available to prospective students. According to the 2010 *Open Doors Report*, nearly five percent of all international students in the United States are pursuing degrees within the health professions. Some of these students will find work in international humanitarian medical organizations that service global communities, while many others will return to their home countries and effect changes in their local health care systems. This issue highlights the numerous opportunities that public health education offers, including fast facts, online resources, and insight from organizations and experts in the field.

The range of degree programs available to public health students in the U.S. is extensive, and Amy Siglock, Program Officer in the University Placement Services Division at the Institute of International Education, offers an in-depth overview of the options. As a complement to Siglock's article, the Association of Schools of Public Health provides a practical guide to the numerous opportunities available to students with a public health degree. Finally, *Connections* interviews Thomas Cook, Professor at the University of Iowa College of Public Health, to get his take on the changing face of public health education in the U.S. and what students should look for in a public health program.

This issue's Am Chair Tour features the EducationUSA center in Alexandria, Egypt, including interviews with Rohayma Rateb and several of the CCC students at the Center. In the third installment of his Best Practices in Social Media Outreach series, EducationUSA Marketing Coordinator Martin Bennett offers some tips on using SMS/text messaging in advising. The News section includes information about joining the live webinar series that provides expert advice on a wide range of advising related topics.

This issue is also accompanied by a PowerPoint presentation entitled "Studying Public Health in the USA." To find this PowerPoint and others, please visit the *Connections* section on the EducationUSA website.

It was great to connect with many of you at the EducationUSA Middle East and North Africa Regional Conference in Doha (please see the News section for a photo and more information). Your questions and comments help us to make *Connections* more pertinent to your center, so please feel free to email me at any time to share your thoughts.

– Shannon Harrison, Executive Editor, *Connections*
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Studying Public Health in the United States: Undergraduate and Graduate Degree Options

By Amy Siglock

Feature

Public Health is an increasingly important field throughout the world, and there are a number of exciting and interesting program opportunities in the U.S. available to students. Core areas of study within public health are biostatistics, epidemiology, environmental health sciences, health policy and management, and social and behavioral sciences. Other common specializations include maternal and child health, international or global health, and health promotion and education (the last being a subset of social and behavioral sciences).

Within the public health field there are a variety of degrees available to students at the undergraduate, masters, and doctoral levels. The application process at each level of degree, and at different institutions, can vary greatly. This article will present information about degree opportunities and application requirements and procedures in the hopes of elucidating the offerings and application processes students will encounter at public health schools in the U.S.

Undergraduate Degree Study

The traditional first degree in the field of public health is the MPH (Master of Public Health); however, some universities offer an undergraduate program. Universities may offer a bachelor's degree in public health, or BSPH, as a combined five-year program that concludes with the student earning both a BSPH and an MPH. Some schools also offer programs that award only a bachelor's degree.

Bachelor of Science in Public Health (BSPH)

BSPH programs provide students with a broad introduction to general public health practices and often require coursework in the core areas of study within the field. Concentrations are also sometimes available in areas such as health behavior, environmental health, and health policy.

Bachelor of Arts (B.A.)

B.A. programs often require both general education coursework and public health-related coursework. This type of program prepares undergraduate students for entry into social science-based public health graduate programs, such as health education and promotion, by providing a background in the social and behavioral sciences.

Bachelor of Science (B.S.)

B.S. programs tend to have a curriculum focused on the natural sciences and public-health related coursework, but also require general education classes. This type of degree program is well suited for students who are interested in entering the fields of epidemiology, biostatistics, or environmental health sciences.

Notes on Applying to Undergraduate Degree Study

At a number of schools students are not able to apply directly to undergraduate programs in public health. In many cases students must apply to the university as an undeclared major, or as another major. Then, at some point during their freshman or sophomore

year, they will be able to officially apply to the School of Public Health to become a public health major. This usually requires a short application form, including an essay. Admissions committees look for a strong grade point average (GPA) in the student's previous undergraduate coursework.

In some cases students are able to apply directly to the BSPH, B.A., or B.S. program in public health in which they are interested. In both of these scenarios, the admissions committees look for a strong GPA during students' high school studies, excellent writing skills as evidenced in the statement of purpose essays, and solid scores on the SAT. International students whose first language is not English will also need to provide TOEFL or IELTS scores.

Graduate Degree Study

Graduate study in public health offers an overview in the public health field and allows students to concentrate on their particular areas of interest. When applying to master's or doctoral programs in public health, students need to identify the areas within the public health field in which they would like to specialize. Common specializations include health policy and management, epidemiology, biostatistics, health education, behavior and promotion, environmental health science, international or global health, and maternal and child health.

Many universities also offer more specific concentrations within these basic core areas. Examples of unique programs include the Program in Forced Migration and Health offered by Columbia University and the Program in Disaster Management at Tulane University. Some additional listings of unique and interesting programs can be found in the sidebar on the next page.

While some students applying to graduate programs in public health may hold an undergraduate degree in public health, the vast majority do not. Most students who apply to master's programs in public health hold undergraduate degrees in a life science or social science field that relates to public health (i.e. biology, psychology, statistics, business), or they hold degrees in medical-based fields such as medicine, nursing, dentistry, or pharmacy. The majority of international students applying to MPH programs are physicians in their home countries.

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Research Centers and Institutes at Schools of Public Health

Many of the strong public health schools in the U.S. have a number of research centers and institutes housed within the university that focus on areas of interest within public health. Most of these institutes conduct research across disciplines in areas of importance in the field. Here are a sampling:

University of California, Los Angeles

www.ph.ucla.edu/centers.html

Examples of Centers at UCLA: Center for Environmental Quality and Health & Center for Global and Immigrant Health

University of Washington

sph.washington.edu/research/centers.asp

Examples of Centers at UW: Center for Public Health Nutrition & Center for Public Health Genetics

University of Pittsburgh

www.publichealth.pitt.edu/interior.php?pageID=135

Examples of Centers at U. Pitt: Center for Aging and Population Health & Center for Public Health Preparedness

Most doctoral programs, including Dr.PH. and Ph.D. programs, require that students hold a master's degree in a related field. This usually means an MPH degree or an M.S. degree in a field such as epidemiology or biostatistics.

In addition to the students' academic backgrounds, universities look closely at the applicants' commitment to public health, as evidenced by their work and volunteer experience and their personal statement. In particular, admissions committees are interested in finding out about how students will utilize their graduate degrees in public health to improve the public health system in their home countries.

Master of Public Health (MPH)

The MPH is the most popular degree in the public health field. It is the first graduate professional degree offered. MPH programs require students to take coursework in all core areas of public health (i.e. health policy and management, epidemiology, social and behavioral sciences, etc.) with a specialization in one of the core areas. The degree typically takes two years to complete; however, a few universities offer one year (either nine or eleven months) programs. These intensive programs are usually available only for students who hold advanced degrees, and the majority of students accepted to these programs are practicing physicians in their home countries.

In addition to coursework, most MPH programs require students to complete a field practicum or internship. Many also require a thesis or capstone project as well.

Master of Science in Public Health (MSPH)

The MSPH is an academic degree that is more research focused than the MPH. This degree typically takes two years to complete and may require field work and a thesis project. Coursework in the core areas of public health is also required. The most common specializations for MSPH degrees are epidemiology, biostatistics, and health policy/research. These programs are rigorous and focus on methodology, research, and data analysis. The degree prepares students for doctoral programs in a related public health field.

Master of Health Administration (MHA) or Master of Health Services Administration (MHSA)

The MHA and MHSA are professional degrees focused primarily on health care management and policy. These programs are typically for midcareer executives who require additional training to manage health organizations. Many programs will require applicants to have at least one undergraduate course in introductory accounting and statistics.

This degree program is focused almost entirely on management and business administration issues and generally does not require coursework in all of the core areas of public health. An internship will typically be required, but a thesis will not.

Doctor of Public Health (Dr.PH.)

The Dr.PH. degree is the terminal professional degree in the field of Public Health. It generally requires three to five years to complete the program.

Applicants to Dr.PH. programs are required to hold a MPH, MSPH, or M.S. in a related public health field.

The Dr.PH. program will require students to complete coursework in all core areas of public health. Students will also select a concentration within the broader field. At least one, and in many cases two, internships or field assignments are required, as is a thesis or capstone project.

Fast Fact

The most common graduate degrees in the public health field in the U.S. are: Master of Public Health (MPH), Master of Science in Public Health (MSPH), Master of Health Administration (MHA), Doctor of Public Health (Dr.PH.), and Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.).

Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)

The Ph.D. is the most advanced academic degree available in public health. It is focused on research and scientific methodology and usually takes three to five years to complete. The Ph.D. program prepares students for careers in research and academia and for leadership positions in government and nongovernmental organizations. These programs emphasize applied research and analysis in the student's area of interest (i.e. epidemiology, health behavior).

A prior M.S. or MPH degree is preferred, but not necessarily required for admission to Ph.D. programs. Competitive GRE scores and a strong research background are important. A match between the student's interests and current faculty interests and research is also an important consideration for admission to a Ph.D. program. It is often essential that a faculty mentor or advisor be identified, either by the student or admissions committee, before an applicant will be admitted to the program.

Notes on Applying to Graduate Degree Study

General Requirements:

The application requirements for graduate programs in public health vary by university and by specific degree program. In general, successful applicants will have at least a 3.0 GPA in their undergraduate studies, a clear study objective and compelling personal statement, three letters of recommendation, and competitive GRE scores. (High scores on the quantitative section of the GRE are important for students interested in the fields of epidemiology and biostatistics.) Some doctoral programs also require applicants to submit an academic writing sample. The sample should be a published article or academic research paper between 10 and 20 pages in length. The subject matter should be related to public health.

Johns Hopkins School of Public Health MPH Program Admissions website is a good example of what most public health programs will cite as requirements: "Successful applicants to the MPH program have a strong academic record and relevant academic preparation with a particular emphasis on quantitative skills....Clear career goals...At least two years of full time, post-baccalaureate, health-related work experience or a doctoral degree in a field underlying public health." All of these components—strong academic background, clear and compelling statement of purpose, and work experience and/or an advanced degree in a health-related field—are essential for a competitive application.

All international students whose first language is not English are also required to submit TOEFL or IELTS scores. To be competitive for admission to master's programs, students should provide a TOEFL score of at least 550 on the paper-based exam or 80 on the iBT exam, although more competitive universities will require scores

of at least 600 and 100, respectively. Doctoral applicants should aim to score 100 or higher on the iBT TOEFL.

Application Process:

Many of the comprehensive schools of public health in the U.S. utilize a common online application called SOPHAS (Schools of Public Health Application Service, www.sophas.org/index.cfm). This application allows students to apply to multiple programs using the same application form. All of the data entered on the application need to be entered only once, regardless of how many programs the student applies to. Students have the opportunity to tailor one essay for each school that will be sent to that individual program. Students have to send only one set of transcripts and other supporting documents (i.e., letters of reference) to SOPHAS. SOPHAS then attaches the documents to the student's account and mails copies of the original documents to each of the universities.

It is important to note that although a number of schools utilize the SOPHAS application, many also require that the student complete a supplemental online application through either the graduate school of that particular university or the school of public health itself. Students should carefully read the individual application requirements and procedures on each university website to make sure they complete all of the necessary forms.

While a number of schools (36 as of March 2011) use the SOPHAS system, many schools of public health, and schools that might not have a designated school of public health but offer public health degrees, use their own graduate school or school of public health online application system. It is important that the student investigate the application process at each school to make sure the correct procedure is followed.

Online Public Health Resources



What is Public Health?: www.whatispublichealth.org
Association of Schools of Public Health: www.asph.org
American Public Health Association: www.apha.org
Council on Education for Public Health: www.ceph.org
American Journal of Public Health: ajph.aphapublications.org
Schools of Public Health Application Service:
www.sophas.org/index.cfm

It is also common for schools that use the SOPHAS system to use only the common application for master's and Dr.PH. applicants. Many schools on the SOPHAS system require Ph.D. applicants to apply through the graduate school. For example, students can apply for an MPH program at Emory University or the University of Kentucky through SOPHAS, but in order to apply to the Ph.D. program they must submit an online application and all required materials to the graduate school of those universities.

There are a number of public health programs in the U.S. that offer both excellent coursework and valuable field and practical experience. To be successful, students should present a strong portfolio

of academic achievements, including grades and test scores, but also show a commitment to public health in their home countries. Admissions committees review the applicants' CVs and admission essays carefully to form an accurate picture of the students' work, volunteer, and research experiences in the public health field and their plans for utilizing the knowledge they will acquire in the U.S. to improve public health when they return home.

Amy Siglock is a Program Officer in the University Placement Services Division at the Institute of International Education.

Public Health Student Spotlight



Name: Kiran S. Kamble

Home Country: India

U.S. University: Harvard School of Public Health – Harvard University

Name of Program: Global Health Concentration – Master of Public Health (MPH)

What advice do you have for other international students who are thinking about applying to a public health program in the U.S.?

My advice to international students is to be as specific as possible in their approach. I recommend taking the following strategic steps:

- Browse through www.asph.org and www.sophas.org to get an idea of the accredited public health institutes in the U.S.;
- Prioritize two or three concentration areas you would like to take on as majors for your public health program, e.g. epidemiology, biostatistics, maternal and child health, etc.;
- Look up these concentrations in the institutions listed on the above websites and shortlist the programs you are interested in;
- Write to the department faculty of the program you are interested in. Be specific and professional in your e-mail correspondence;
- Complete the mandatory requirements (GRE, TOEFL, etc.) well in advance; and
- Make the most of EducationUSA resources.

What is unique about your institution's public health program?

I graduated from the Harvard School of Public Health (HSPH) with a Master of Public Health (MPH). The unique selling feature

of my institution is its perfect balance between theory and practice. HSPH has an interesting mix of faculty that have excelled in both academia and public health practice.

Why did you decide to study public health in the United States?

After having practiced in the health sector for sixteen years – eight years in public health – I realized that I needed to acquire certain skills to contribute better to public health. I made a list of my weaknesses and shopped around for appropriate institutions and programs globally. Eighty percent of the institutions on my list were from the U.S., so I decided to focus my energy on applying to a public health program there.

What do you hope to do with your degree once you return to your home country?

I have joined a colleague in establishing a global health organization (www.o3iglobal.org) and our aim is to contribute to innovative, evidence-based public health interventions for underserved populations in developing countries. As far as my country India is concerned, I want to strengthen the public health systems in such relatively less developed states as Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, Jammu, and Kashmir.

Career Opportunities in Public Health

By Association of Schools of Public Health (ASPH)

Feature

Public health is a diverse and dynamic field. Public health professionals come from varying educational backgrounds and can specialize in an array of fields. Public health professionals serve local, national, and international communities. They are leaders who meet the many exciting challenges in protecting the public's health today and in the future.

Public health careers offer something for everyone. Epidemiology and biostatistics involve mathematics and modeling. Environmental health includes a wide range of science skills. Health administration incorporates business and management skills. Health education involves skills required to develop community-wide prevention programs. Health policy includes an understanding of law-making processes. This is an exciting time to pursue a career in public health. Some of the reasons include:

- Most experts agree that major advances in improvement of health over the next decades will not come from new medical findings or cures, but rather the broader development and application of population-based prevention programs.
- Health services delivery systems are undergoing rapid change. Greater emphasis is being placed on health promotion and disease prevention as a means to reduce the costs of care by improving the health of our populations. These changes have created a broad array of new opportunities for professionals with advanced training in public health.
- As the public has become better informed about the effects of toxic wastes and pollutants on their health, greater emphasis is being placed on assuring the safety of our communities as well as worker health and safety. As a result, there is growing demand for experts in environmental health and industrial hygiene.
- Public health research is focusing more on women's health, and child and substance abuse, and an increased emphasis is being placed on behavioral change to prevent the risk of STDs, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and unplanned pregnancies. Greater emphasis is also being placed on school health and the health of minority and disadvantaged populations.

What are the career opportunities in public health?

While there are dozens of specialties in public health, most career opportunities are found in the following fields:

- Health Services Administration
- Biostatistics
- Epidemiology
- Health Education/Behavioral Science
- Environmental Health
- International Health
- Nutrition
- Public Health Practice/Program Management
- Biomedical Laboratory

Where do public health professionals work?

Public health professionals work in both the public and private sectors. Many public health graduates will find work in the public sector in local, state, or federal health departments. The jobs available at health departments range from Food Safety Inspectors to Health Educators; from Policy Analysts to Epidemiologists. Other public health professionals will find work in university systems as researchers.

Those interested in working for a nonprofit organization can find jobs in health advocacy, policy, or research, or at a local nonprofit that focuses on specific health issues. Still other public health professionals will find work in the private sector, working in randomized control trials for pharmaceutical companies or for health insurance companies.

How can a graduate degree in public health enhance one's career opportunities?

Many public health jobs require a graduate degree in public health. A graduate degree gives public health professionals a competitive edge over other professionals and enables professionals to:

- gain knowledge of the factors that influence local, national, and global legislative and social policies;
- apply broad-based, state-of-the-art quantitative and qualitative skills needed for problem solving;
- develop multidisciplinary and collaborative strategies for solving health-related problems;
- enhance communication skills by working with diverse populations; and,
- be positioned for a leadership role in health promotion and disease prevention.

What kind of job title can I expect after graduating with a degree in public health?

A degree in public health provides innumerable opportunities with multiple specializations within the five core disciplines in a master's of public health degree program.

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Education

Public health problems involve complex and interrelated social, behavioral, legal, medical, and economic issues. If you are interested in health education, virtually every specialization within public health offers career opportunities that will make an impact on people's lives. As an educator with a graduate degree in public health, your primary challenge will be to develop and implement interventions designed to improve overall health.

Examples of job settings:

- Colleges and universities
- Public and private secondary schools
- Consumer advocacy organizations
- International organizations
- Consulting firms
- State legislative committees
- Health service delivery organizations
- Community organizations
- Federal and state health agencies
- Voluntary health agencies

Administration/Management

Rapid changes in both the private and public sectors of health care and related industries mean more opportunities for qualified professionals to manage complex institutions, organizations, and health services delivery programs. Whether your background is in science or business, there are dynamic career opportunities for public health graduates in all sectors of the health care industry.

Examples of job settings:

- Hospitals and clinics
- Managed care organizations
- Insurance companies
- International agencies
- Pharmaceutical and hospital supply firms
- Professional organizations
- Federal, state, and local government agencies
- Industry and business
- Colleges and universities
- Consulting firms

Policy

Health policy examines the complexity and dynamics of our public health system and its impact on the health of individuals and communities. Whether you're looking for a career in health policy in the private or public sector, a graduate degree in public health will multiply your career opportunities regardless of your academic background. With an advanced degree, you'll be in a position to make vital health policy decisions that affect countless lives.

Examples of job settings:

- Regulatory agencies
- Advocacy groups
- Government agencies
- Public & private foundations
- Professional associations
- Industry
- Corporations
- Think tanks
- Consulting firms

About ASPH

The Association of Schools of Public Health (ASPH) represents the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH)-accredited schools of public health. CEPH is the accrediting body for both schools of public health and public health programs. There are many benefits of attending a CEPH-accredited school. Accreditation is a rigorous peer-review process which assures a well-rounded graduate education. Attending a CEPH accredited school of public health will qualify degree holders for many jobs which specify graduation from an accredited school as a condition of employment.

ASPH promotes the efforts of schools of public health to improve the health of every person through education, research, and policy. Based on 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.

Established in 1953, ASPH serves as a resource for member schools by:

- Improving the public's health by advancing professional and graduate education, research and service in public health;
- Developing partnerships with governmental, private, professional, corporate, and community agencies to strengthen education, research, and service in accredited schools of public health;
- Collecting national data and identifying trends relevant to public health education;
- Facilitating cooperative initiatives among the schools, such as the development of competencies for MPH graduates and creation of portable public health curricula;
- Promoting public health as a career option; and
- Encouraging and promoting the development of practice-based training opportunities for students and graduates.

For more information, visit www.asph.org

Community Practice

Community practice offers career opportunities to those striving for mobility or a leadership position in health care programs. A graduate degree in public health will equip you with the knowledge and leadership experiences needed to launch a successful career in community practice.

Examples of job settings:

- Federal, state, and local health agencies
- Voluntary agencies
- Relief agencies
- Consulting firms
- Crisis centers
- International organizations
- Rehabilitation centers
- Health services delivery organizations
- Substance abuse centers and agencies
- Centers for the aging

Research

A career in basic and applied research demands interdisciplinary skills to meet the challenges of a rapidly-changing field. A background in science – biological, natural, social, or behavioral – opens the door to many career opportunities, and an advanced degree in public health will help you realize your full potential.

Examples of job settings:

- Research agencies
- Private research firms
- Public and private foundations
- Industry
- Ministries of health
- State and local governments
- Academic institutions
- International health agencies
- Labor and consumer organizations
- Health services delivery organizations

Public Health Student Spotlight



Name:

Altinay Jarimbetova

Home Country: Uzbekistan

University: Western Illinois University

Name of Program:

Health Education and Promotion

Name:

Verónica Alejandra Fuentes Cáceres

Home Country: Chile

University: Pennsylvania State University

Name of Program:

Ph.D. in Health Policy and Administration

What advice do you have for other international students who are thinking about applying to a public health program in the U.S.?

Altinay: Public health programs in the U.S. are different from those in Uzbekistan. It is helpful to get to know the U.S. system of public health, along with the U.S. insurance and legal systems as they relate to health. These were the areas that I struggled with for a while.

Verónica: My advice is to contact professors and students in the program they are interested in, to have an understanding of the strengths of the program, and to assess whether their objectives can be achieved by enrolling in that particular program.

What is unique about your institution's public health program?

Altinay: It offers students a choice between community health education and health sciences with an emphasis on public health.

Verónica: The advantage of my program is that there are several opportunities for working in research right away. Another important advantage is that the program incorporates quantitative and qualitative training in the first year, which helps us to be in a better position to decide the kind of research that we want to pursue.

What do you hope to do with your degree once you return to your home country?

Altinay: I would like to continue working with international humanitarian medical organizations such as Doctors Without Borders, the Red Cross, and Medical Teams International.

Verónica: I plan to go back to Chile and work in academia. Ultimately, I want to produce knowledge that helps to solve pressing problems in my country's healthcare system, and to train professionals to implement the changes necessary to solve those problems.

Connections interviewed Thomas Cook, a professor in the Department of Occupational and Environmental Health at the University of Iowa College of Public Health, to provide readers with an inside perspective on how international students engage in studying public health in the United States. The College of Public Health, founded in 1999 out of long-established programs at the University of Iowa, brings together educational and research programs to promote global leadership across the disciplines of public health, with a special emphasis on the health of rural populations.

Connections: What distinguishes public health education in the U.S. from public health education in other parts of the world?

Professor Cook: From my own experiences I've found that some international students sometimes have different conceptions of what constitutes the field of public health than students in the United States. Historically, the field of public health was focused first and foremost on investigating rates and patterns of infectious diseases, and in many developing countries, public health is still largely equated with the study of infectious diseases.

In the United States and most European countries, the vision of public health has broadened to include a wider range of topics and concerns. Public health schools across the United States are now examining a diverse array of issues that include maternal and child health, nutrition, substance abuse, and injury prevention, to name just a few. There's been a real awakening recently to the possibilities of what the field of public health can and should encompass.

Connections: What are some of the recent trends in public health education in the United States?

Professor Cook: For one thing, there has been an increase in the number of joint degree programs in public health schools across the United States. In the University of Iowa's College of Public Health, it's not uncommon to see aspiring lawyers who hope to specialize in health-related issues doing a joint degree program in law and public health, and the same would go for environmental engineers doing joint degrees in engineering and public health. We also have joint degree programs with the veterinary school that deal with food safety and diseases that might cross over into our food from animals—for example, avian flu or salmonella.

I think that all of these joint degree programs speak to the cross-disciplinary and collaborative nature of public health education in the United States. At the University of Iowa's College of Public Health, nearly all faculty members have secondary appointments with schools and departments across the campus, and many of our students are enrolled in joint degree programs.



Thomas Cook, a professor in the Department of Occupational and Environmental Health at the University of Iowa College of Public Health

Connections: What do admissions counselors look for when reviewing applications from international students who apply to a public health program?

Professor Cook: I can speak only from my experience at the University of Iowa. In general, when we review applications from international students, we very much look for applicants who have ties to institutions and organizations in their home countries. That is, we look for applicants who have worked in public health in some capacity in their home countries and are now seeking to broaden their skills and knowledge base. While real world experience is important for us in making admissions decisions, we also look for applicants who show obvious passion for a specific public health issue. We prefer applicants who

will return to their home countries at the completion of their programs and make positive contributions to their local communities. Applicants that have connections to local public health institutions and demonstrate passion for the field give us confidence that they'll be able to mobilize their home communities and apply what they've learned in our program to their places of origin.

Connections: What distinguishes the public health program at the University of Iowa?

Professor Cook: Because of our geographic location in the Midwest, the University of Iowa College of Public Health has a longstanding focus on rural and agricultural health. That is, we have developed expertise in health issues that relate specifically to our surrounding communities, which are primarily rural and centered on farming. But our program has evolved steadily over the years in diverse ways. The program now has a multidisciplinary orientation. In addition, we've become more internationally focused, and have established partnerships with universities from such places as The Gambia and several former Soviet countries.

Thomas Cook is a professor in the Department of Occupational and Environmental Health at the University of Iowa College of Public Health.