

University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences

Fay W. Boozman College of Public Health

DrPH Program in Public Health Leadership

**Policies & Procedures for Qualifying Examination**

Version 1.5

Applies to students enrolling August 2014 or later

The DrPH Program in Public Health Leadership at the UAMS Fay W. Boozman College of Public Health requires that the student complete a comprehensive qualifying examination, which is administered in two parts, one written and one oral. The policies and procedures in this document provide general guidelines for those examinations. The written portion of the examination is administered by the DrPH faculty in the second week of July each year; the oral portion of the examination is administered approximately four weeks following the written examination.

### **I. Student Eligibility for Qualifying Exam**

Students in the DrPH program are eligible to sit for the qualifying examination when they have completed no less than 33 hours of required coursework, excluding credit hours earned for participating in required seminars. Students must email the DrPH Program Director(s) no later than May 1 of the year they intend to take the qualifying examination, indicating their intentions to sit for the exam.

A student who has indicated an intention to take the exam who then decides not to take the exam or is otherwise unable to take the exam must discuss this with the DrPH Program Director(s) and come to agreement with the DrPH Program Director(s) about an alternative plan. Such arrangements should be finalized at least one week prior to the start of the Qualifying Examination week. Emergencies requiring a student to deviate from this policy must be communicated *immediately* to the DrPH Program Director(s); if a student makes his/her request to miss all or a portion of the exam less than a week before the first day of the scheduled exam sessions, the Program Director(s) may require supporting documentation. In general, students will not be permitted to complete a subset of the exam sessions and miss others, especially if the student's absence from the exam session(s) could have been predicted by the student in advance.

### **II. Preparation for Qualifying Examination**

The DrPH Faculty Leadership Committee strongly recommends that students begin preparing for Qualifying Examinations NO LATER than April 15 of the year they intend to sit for the exam. Students are encouraged to seek additional advice regarding preparation for the exam from fellow students and from faculty. Students who will be taking the exam in the same year may want to consider preparing for the examination together; such collaboration is both permitted and encouraged. However, individual students should determine the method and format of study that will best prepare them for a successful performance on the examination.

No study guides are available to assist students in preparation for the exam. Students are encouraged to review the example question posted in the Blackboard MyCommunity site for the DrPH program to gain familiarity with the kind of question that will be asked. Generally students are asked to apply material learned in didactic classes to posed hypothetical situations. Students should be prepared to: identify options available for

response to a hypothetical situation posed in the question; identify the theoretical bases for making a decision about a particular response option; identify stakeholders who should be engaged in the response; identify communication and engagement strategies needed for the response; identify data that may be needed to more fully understand the situation and craft a response; select a response option and justify that selection; and propose an evaluation plan to assess the effectiveness of the response. Students typically study by reviewing syllabi and course notes from courses already taken.

### **III. Format and Procedures for Administration of the Qualifying Examination**

#### **A. Written Examination**

Faculty members who are responsible for teaching in the Public Health Practice/Science core curricula in the DrPH Program are responsible for writing the examination questions. All questions are reviewed by the DrPH Faculty Leadership Committee prior to administration of the exam.

The exam is scheduled for Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday of the second week in July. One question is administered per day, beginning at 9:00 AM and finishing at 4:00 PM, giving students 6 hours to respond to each exam question. Exam administration details (time, location, other logistics) will be provided by the DrPH Program Director[s] no later than the first of June immediately prior to the exam. Students requiring accommodation due to disability in exam administration should refer to the CPH Policy Statement on Students with Disabilities, available in the CPH Course Catalog and on the CPH website. Accommodation requests must be made to the DrPH Program Director(s) at least two weeks prior to the administration of the examination.

The written qualifying examination will take the form of three (3) cases relevant to current public health leadership challenges. Each case (one presented each day) will be accompanied by a series of questions to be answered by the student. The cases and questions will be provided to the student at 9:00 am on the Friday prior to the examination week, giving the student a chance to review the cases and consider the various implications.

Students must present to the examination room by 9:00 am each morning and by 1:00 pm each afternoon, unless instructed otherwise (in advance) by the DrPH Program Director(s). Materials that are permitted in the exam room include pens and pencils, a purse or bag containing personal items (wallet, cell phone, etc.) and snacks or beverages. **NO** other materials will be allowed in the exam room without prior permission from the DrPH Faculty Leadership Committee. Cell phones will be placed in the vibrate mode and will be kept by the examination proctor during the period of the examination.

Each exam session will have an assigned faculty monitor and an assigned staff proctor. The faculty monitor will be a member of the DrPH Faculty Leadership Committee or a member of the teaching faculty in the DrPH curriculum. The faculty monitor may not be in the room throughout the exam session, but will be in the CPH building and available throughout the exam session through the staff proctor. At the start of each exam session,

the faculty monitor or staff proctor will read specific rules for the exam (including the ending time for the exam) and then provide each student with an envelope containing the exam questions for that session, note paper, and a thumb drive. The proctor will also have additional pens or pencils available in case they are needed. Once the exam questions have been distributed, the COPH Honor Code will be fully in force; students may not give or receive assistance on the examination from any individual in or outside of the room. Cell phones, texting devices, personal digital assistants, and email may not be used during the exam period except in cases of emergency, which will be approved by the exam proctor and reported to the faculty monitor immediately. Students may be excused by the proctor for short breaks during the exam period; however, only one student may be out of the exam room at a given time. Students will be instructed that they may NOT access the internet or other resource materials during the lunch break.

The examination room will be equipped with a computer for each student. Students may make preparatory notes on the provided paper and draft responses on the computer prior to writing their final response. All notes and drafts must be turned in to the exam proctor, together with the final response. The final response must be completed in a word-processing program (unless otherwise specifically directed in the examination question), and must include a header on each page indicating the student's name, the exam session or content (e.g., "Monday, Case 1"), and the phrase "FINAL RESPONSE." Draft responses should not contain a header. ONLY those pages denoted as "FINAL RESPONSE" will be graded by DrPH faculty.

When a student has finished his or her final response, or at the end of the examination period, whichever comes first, the student must save the final response to the thumb drive provided by the proctor, AND must print all draft files and the final response to the printer indicated by the proctor (the proctor will be available to assist all students with printing of drafts and final responses, and to troubleshoot technical difficulties). All examination materials (including the exam questions, note paper, student notes or printed drafts, the printed final response, and the thumb drive) must be returned to the exam proctor prior to the student's leaving the exam room.

If a student has a personal emergency after an exam session has started, and that emergency requires that the student leave the examination room prior to finishing that exam session, he or she should notify the exam session proctor immediately. The proctor will contact the faculty monitor, who will meet with the student to determine an appropriate course of action. The faculty monitor will permit the student to leave without completing the exam only in very dire circumstances and only after determining a plan for completion of the exam. The faculty monitor may choose to confer with the DrPH Program Director(s), if available, before making this determination. The Program Director(s) should be informed about such an event and its resolution as soon as possible by phone or email. A student who leaves an exam session without consulting with a faculty monitor (and receiving instruction from that faculty monitor) and without turning in a paper marked "final response" will receive a failing grade for that particular examination session.

Exceptions to this rule may be made only by a vote of the DrPH Faculty Leadership Committee.

Should an exam session be interrupted because of an unplanned event (e.g., by a fire drill, tornado warning or other similar event), the session proctor and faculty monitor will confer (with the DrPH Program Director[s], if possible) to determine an appropriate course of action. In general, the DrPH faculty monitors will work to ensure that students have the full allotted time to complete each exam question. Should such an unplanned event occur during the exam, the faculty monitor should notify the DrPH Program Director(s) as soon as possible via phone or email regarding the event and its resolution.

Exam questions will be graded by members of the DrPH Faculty Leadership Committee prior to the administration of the oral portion of the examination, which will be scheduled for a time 4 weeks after the written examination and not less than one week before the August meeting of the DrPH Faculty Leadership Committee (currently the fourth Thursday of the month).

## **B. Oral Examination**

The oral portion of the examination will be administered 4 weeks after the written examination. In the interim period, students will not be given, nor are they allowed to seek, feedback from faculty about their performance on the written portion of the exam. Each student will be interviewed separately by members of the DrPH Faculty Leadership Committee and other faculty teaching courses within the DrPH program. Questions will be asked to clarify the written responses provided to the Comps questions, as well as elicit information that will help the faculty judge the degree to which the student has mastered the concepts presented in classes and can apply those concepts to public health problems and processes. The oral examination will be scheduled for a period of 1.5 hours.

## **IV. Grading of the Qualifying Examination**

If a member of the committee is not able to attend the August meeting, he/she will provide the DrPH Program Director[s] with their assessment of student performance prior to the meeting; the DrPH Program Director[s] will then act as that faculty member's proxy during the meeting. The DrPH Faculty Leadership Committee will, as part of their August meeting agenda, review each student's performance on the written and oral examinations and determine the outcome for each student. The result of this review will be one of three possible outcomes: Pass, Fail, or Remediate.

During the determination of student performance, the faculty will grade the student's performance, considering both written and oral responses, on each question using a 5-point scale, with 1 being the lowest level of performance and 5 being the highest. Mean scores for each student will be computed. Students whose mean score falls between 5.0 and 3.5 (inclusive) will be considered to have passed the qualifying examination. A student whose mean score falls between 2.0 and 3.49 (inclusive) will be offered the opportunity to complete a series of individualized remediation activities (see below for more information) and re-take

the examination the following year. A student whose mean score falls at or below 1.99 will be considered to have failed the qualifying examination and will be administratively withdrawn from the program.

## **V. Remediation**

If a student is required to remediate the Qualifying exam, the DrPH Faculty Leadership Committee will identify an individualized series of remediation activities to be completed by the student prior to re-taking the examination. These remediation activities may include completing additional courses, re-taking courses already completed, completing directed study, and/or completing independent study. The letter that the student receives regarding the outcome of the DrPH Faculty Leadership Committee's deliberation will include the list of specific remediation activities required by the DrPH Faculty Leadership Committee.

Remediation activities must be completed no later than the end of the Summer term following the original Qualifying exam and prior to the student's re-take of the Qualifying exams.

## **VI. Re-take of the Qualifying Exams**

After completing all remediation activities, the student will re-take the qualifying exams. Such re-take must occur no later than the first regularly scheduled examination offered after the original qualifying exam taken by the student (i.e., one year later). The student will complete the written exam and oral exam as described above and his/her performance will be graded using the processes and metrics described above. If the student does not pass the re-take exam with a mean score of 3.5 or greater, then the student will be considered to have failed the qualifying exam and will be administratively withdrawn from the DrPH program.

## **VII. Notification of Results of Qualifying Exams**

The DrPH Program Director[s] will send a letter via email (hard copy via certified U.S. Mail) to each student who completed the Qualifying examinations no more than one (1) week following the August meeting of the DrPH Faculty Leadership Committee, notifying the student of the outcome of the DrPH Faculty Leadership Committee's deliberation (i.e., the results of the exam). The DrPH Program Co-directors will complete and sign the **Doctoral Qualifying Examination Completion Form** and submit it to the Office of the University Registrar, with copies to the student and the COPH Office of Student Affairs, no later than one week following the August meeting of the DrPH Faculty Leadership Committee.

## **VIII. Implications of Completion of Qualifying Exams**

A student who has completed the Qualifying Examination is eligible to: (1) take any remaining required or elective courses in the DrPH curriculum; and (2) begin their DrPH practica and capstone (dissertation) work.

A student who has not completed the Qualifying Examination (on either the first or second effort) may not begin a DrPH Practicum or dissertation project. Students may

take required or elective courses while completing remediation activities. Exceptions to this policy may be made only by a vote of the DrPH Faculty Leadership Committee.

## **VIX. General Timeline**

<b>Qualifying Examination Timeline</b> (Initiated spring semester in the year a student intends to take Qualifying Examination)	
Apr 15	Student begin preparation for exam
May 1	Student emails DrPH Program Director[s] to notify of intent to take Exam
Jun 1	DrPH Program Director informs student about exam location and logistics
Jun-Aug	Students who are unable to take exam as planned must notify Program Director[s] at least one week before the scheduled date
July	Written exam administered in the second week in July
Aug	Oral exam administered 4 weeks after the written comps (at least one week before the regularly scheduled DrPH Faculty Leadership meeting)
Aug	Exam performance discussed at the August DrPH Faculty Leadership Committee Meeting (currently 4 <sup>th</sup> Thursday of the month)
Aug 31	DrPH Program Director mails exam results to students

# Doctoral Qualifying Examination Completion Form



Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Student ID: \_\_\_\_\_

Student Email: \_\_\_\_\_@uams.edu

Academic Advisor: \_\_\_\_\_

Semester first enrolled in doctoral program (e.g., Fall 2016): \_\_\_\_\_

Program:  DRPH       EPI       HPPR       HSSR

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Date passed qualifying exam and advanced to candidacy: \_\_\_\_\_

Doctoral Program (co)director: \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature/Date

Doctoral Program (co)director: \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature/Date

Department Chair: \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature/Date

Original: Office of the University Registrar

Cc: Student  
Doctoral program director(s)  
COPH Office of Student Affairs