

Interdisciplinary Studies Proposal: “Public Health Studies”

Elise Wells

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Until recently, Public Health has been in the shadow of a traditional downstream approach to healthcare. For the past few decades this downstream model has shown an emphasis on dealing with illness after it strikes. As people begin to move towards a preventative attitude when it comes to medicine, the field of Public Health has begun to soar. According to the World Health Organization, public health is defined as “all organized measures [taken] to prevent disease, promote health, and prolong life.” The first section in that definition, the very reason I was drawn to public health, is the importance of preventative healthcare. Healthcare and helping people feel better has always appealed to me, but avoiding illness and keeping people healthy has become my passion. That is why I am proposing an Interdisciplinary Studies major where I can work to understand people and their relationship with health. By understanding this relationship I can aid in the search for more efficient ways of preventing illness and protecting my community. With the help of my advising committee, I have chosen ten core courses that I believe will give me the foundation I need to start my journey into Public Health. These courses come from three areas of education including the natural sciences, the social sciences, and public health. The subjects within these capacities include chemistry, biology, politics, sociology, psychology and public health courses from the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences.

Because public health is based on the natural sciences I will be including Accelerated General Chemistry (CHEM 150)* and Cell Biology (BIO 150)* as part of my core curriculum. These classes will teach me the basic structures as well as functions of the chemicals and cells that impact the human body. This is a necessity when understand the human body and the way it reacts the surrounding environment. As a public health official understanding the human body is crucial if I am to keep it working properly.

The next four courses will be taken in the social sciences so that I may gain a better background in how social/cultural influences affect health. I will be engaging in politics as I study public health. In public health I understand that I will be dealing with the government and the policies that are put into place. Understanding the formulation and implementation of policy is key to achieving progress in our society. To reach this level of understanding I will be taking Public Policy (POLI 235).

The next core course will come from the field of sociology. I will be taking Medicine and Culture (SOCI 380) to help me gain a greater understanding of how medicine and society influence one another. This course will help me comprehend the practice of medicine and the experience of health as a whole. Both medicine and culture are mobile in nature; they constantly evolve and create shifts in each other. Learning about this delicate relationship is important if I am to create a change in healthcare perspectives.

Next I will take Health Psychology (PSYC 351) and Behavioral Neuroscience (PSYC 360) to further my knowledge of health from a psychosocial perspective. Health Psychology will give me insight into a psychological viewpoint on health and disease; it will teach me the ways that health influences the mind. Behavioral Neuroscience focuses on brain influences and regulating behaviors as it relates to health and will guide me in understanding how these behaviors affect health.

The last set of courses will be taken at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences as part of the 4+1 program. As part of my master's degree I will take these courses to gain a stronger foundation in Public Health. I will be taking Healthcare Systems, Epidemiology, Intro to Health Behavior and Health Education, as well as Biostatistics. These courses will offer me a chance to see where my passion is and help me decide where my future lies.

The following 10 classes are required for my major:

Natural Science Courses:

Chemistry

- Accelerated General Chemistry(CHEM 150)*

Biology

- Cell Biology(BIO 150)*

Social Science Courses:

Psychology

- Health Psychology(PSYC 351)
- Behavioral Neuroscience(PSYC 360)

Sociology

- Medicine and Culture(SOCI 380)

Politics

- Public Policy(POLI 235)

Public Health Courses:

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- Healthcare Systems(>400)*
- Epidemiology(>400)
- Biostatistics(>400)
- Intro to Health Behavior and Health Education(>400)

(* = Courses already taken)

Senior Capstone Experience

My senior capstone experience will consist of an internship with the Shepherd Higher Education Consortium on Poverty (SHECP). I will spend the summer paired with an agency that works to benefit under-resourced members of society. I will give a presentation on my experience with agency and my time spent interning. I will incorporate what I learned during my summer as well as my courses into this presentation. My advising committee will give me a grade based on this presentation.

Public health is a broad and extensive branch of healthcare and I have created a major that I feel is a direct reflection of this truth. I have included the natural sciences, the social sciences and specific public health courses to give me a foundation for handling all that is public health. I believe that it is specific to my goals but inclusive of all subjects and learning domains.

Upon approval and graduation, I know that this major will give me a leg up within the Public Health Community.

Committee Members

Dr. Jennifer Penner

Dr. Joyce Hardin

Student Signature

Elise Wells