Public Health Nutrition Concentration
Frequently Asked Questions

I do not have an undergraduate nutrition science or biologic science background. Can I still apply?
Applicants should have a bachelor’s degree that ideally includes some coursework in food and nutrition sciences, human biology, biochemistry, and/or physiology. Coursework in other social sciences, including psychology, behavioral science, or economics can strengthen your application. If you have not completed any of this coursework during your undergraduate degree, we strongly encourage you to take the courses you are missing before applying to the public Health Nutrition program for a stronger application.

Where should I take the science and nutrition courses?
You can take the courses at any college, university, or community college, or through our UC Extension Program. UC Extension offers post baccalaureate Health Sciences courses to help students prepare for admission to a health professions graduate school like the School of Public Health (http://www.unex.berkeley.edu/profseq/health.html).

When should I take these courses?
Ideally, you should take the courses in the year before you apply to the program, if you do not have an undergraduate degree in nutrition or biologic science. We would like to see that you have taken these courses, and that you have good to excellent grades on your transcript, when we review your application for admission. The Public Health program is rigorous, and your ability to achieve high grades in these courses helps us to confirm that you will be able to handle the course load.

I want to counsel individuals about nutrition and healthy eating. Can I get the courses I need to do this at Berkeley with the PHN concentration?
The MPH at UC Berkeley trains students to work on a population level to plan, implement, direct, and evaluate programs, conduct research, identify policy needs, and work to implement new policies. If you are more interested in working with individuals, consider a program that offers a Didactic Program in Dietetics to gain the skills you need to be a Registered Dietitian. Go to the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics website (www.eatright.org) for a listing of academic programs that offer Masters’ degrees and coursework needed to prepare to be a Registered Dietitian. The PHN program may be able to accommodate a small number of exceptional students who wish to complete the Didactic Program in Dietetics through a joint collaboration with UC Berkeley’s Department of Nutrition and Toxicology.

Can I take the nutrition and science courses I need at the same time as I get my master’s degree?
The courses and field work required for the 2-year MPH are very demanding, and require the full 2 years. Many of the courses required in the first year require a basic knowledge of these topics. It is possible to take a few advanced nutrition courses as electives; however, these courses have organic chemistry, biochemistry, and physiology as prerequisites. We strongly encourage you to take at least some of the recommended courses prior to application to the program to ensure your success in the program.

What are you looking for in applicants?
High grades, excellent GRE scores, relevant work experience, and a good match between what the program offers and the students’ goals are all important for admission. We will look for enthusiasm for and commitment to making a contribution to the public's health, as well as critical thinking ability with an analytical approach to solving current issues in Nutrition and Public Health, as reflected in your Statement of Purpose. Letters of recommendation that attest to your qualities in these areas are also important.

Could you suggest some relevant work experience?
Most students admitted for the MPH have at least one to two years of work experience to confirm their interests and career directions. Many have served in the Peace Corps, Americorps, or Teach for America, or have worked in health departments, Cooperative Extension, WIC clinics, and local food banks. These types of experiences provide excellent opportunities to see public health needs in action, and help prospective students to have a better idea of the direction for graduate work.

Could I go directly into the DrPH program and complete nutrition coursework at UC Berkeley rather than getting a Master's Degree first?
Rather than an individual department program, the DrPH at the School of Public Health is a school-wide program. Students must first have a Masters degree and 2 or more years of experience before applying for the DrPH. More information is on the UC Berkeley DrPH Website: http://drph.berkeley.edu/. DrPH students with interests in nutrition can elect the PHN specialty, and develop a nutrition-related research project.