



**ASPEN**  
UNIVERSITY

**2024-2025**

**Doctor of  
Public Health**

**4605 East Elwood Street  
Suite 300  
Phoenix, AZ 85040**

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# DrPH Handbook

# Statement

All students must abide by the Academic Catalog in addition to the programmatic guidelines outlined in this handbook. Both the catalog and handbook are updated annually at a minimum. Students should check back regularly for updates.

To find additional information about this program, please see the program page with the Academic Catalog and university website.

## **Program Administration**

### **Dean of Nursing & Health Sciences**

Dr. Jenny Erkfitz, EdD, MSN, RN

### **DrPH Program Director**

Dr. Marc Gayol, Ed.D., MPH, MBA, MSN

Certified as true and correct in content and policy by

Kevin Thrasher, Provost

May 16, 2025

# Advisory Board Information

## **Purpose:**

The Health Sciences Program Advisory Board acts in an advisory and consultative capacity to promote, assist, and perpetuate the goals and objectives of Aspen University DrPH program. This committee meets annually.

## **Functions:**

- Identify emerging health care needs that may require programmatic and institutional response
- Provide an opportunity for the exchange of viewpoints between business/professional persons, alumni, and academicians as they relate to health sciences education.
- Provide a direct liaison between faculty and the community for the purpose of promoting the activities and mission of the Aspen University DrPH program and the health sciences profession.
- Advise and inform the Dean of Nursing and Health Sciences on local, state, and national perceptions regarding the public health profession, suggest possible avenues for marketing the program.

## **Membership:**

Dean of Nursing and Health Sciences and program administrators, and various members of the community of interest: current student, alumni, nurses, leaders in health care.

The Aspen University Schools have established an Advisory Council that:

- Includes members who are not otherwise employed or contracted by the University;
- Consists of practitioners in the field for which the program prepares students;
- Convenes at least annually;
- Provides advice on the current level of skills, knowledge, and abilities individuals need for entry into the occupation; and
- Provides advice on the adequacy of Doctoral programs' objectives, curriculum, and course materials.

# Catalog Links

Students are required to abide by the university policies outlined in the Academic Catalog. You can see the entire Academic Catalog. Below are some direct links to policies that students frequently reference.

- [Transfer Credit](#)
- [Payment Methods](#)
- [Good Academic Standing](#)
- [Satisfactory Academic Progress](#)
- [Continuous Enrollment](#)
- [Leave of Absence](#)
- [Academic Progress and Participation](#)
- [Grading](#)
- [Late Work](#)
- [Course Extension](#)
- [Code of Conduct](#)

# DrPH Statement and Goals

## DrPH Handbook Statement

The Doctor of Public Health (DrPH) Handbook defines the conceptual framework for the program, including the knowledge and understanding, skills and practices, and the dispositions and identity expected of DrPH students. This handbook, plus specific school supplements, provides all the information necessary to successfully complete the DrPH program.

## DrPH Program Learning Goals

It is intended that Graduates of the Aspen University Doctor of Public Health Practice program will learn or be able to do the following:

- Evidence-based Approaches to Public Health: Utilize epidemiological methods, use data collection methods, and interpret results of data analysis for improvement to public health research, policy, or practice.
- Public Health & Health Care Systems: Critique public health theory and evidence to plan, develop and administer projects, create partnerships, implement programs and institutional strategies to reduce community and individual health risks to mitigate the impact of disease.
- Planning & Management to Promote Health: Formulate how health systems performance is affected by various approaches to health care organization, health law, health workforce development and health care financing.
- Policy in Public Health: Advocate for political, social or economic policies and programs that will improve health in diverse populations.
- Leadership: Integrate principles of leadership, governance and management, which include creating a vision, empowering others, fostering collaboration and guiding decision-making.
- Collaboration: Disseminate culturally appropriate public health content, both in writing and through oral presentation, perform effectively on interprofessional teams and apply systems thinking tools to a public health issue.
- Innovation: Create innovation for prevention of disease and improvement of population health.

## Student Achievement and Satisfaction

Aspen University's outcomes assessment plan provides an ongoing review of student achievement and satisfaction. The plan has three components:

- student learning outcomes;
- measurement of student learning outcomes; and
- program, course and services improvements resulting from the measurement.

The plan reflects an ongoing process of reviewing performance and achievement of objectives.

The University's administrators and Professors/Faculty Chairs review the program and courses in conjunction with assessment tools and measurements to determine if program learning goals are being achieved and how the program and courses can be improved. Because a variety of education goals and objectives have been identified by Aspen University, comprehensive assessment strategies require the use of more than one measurement instrument to determine program and course effectiveness. The Aspen University Provost provides overall leadership for the assessment program with support from the Chief Academic Officer, and other support staff.

Doctoral student achievement is measured by:

- DrPH Course Assignments
- Doctor of Public Health Project
- Immersion & Internship Hours
- Signature assignments

The following indirect measurement tools are used to measure overall quality and to assess student satisfaction with the courses and program.

- Student End-of-Course Evaluations
- Alumni Survey
- Employer Survey
- Student Testimonials

To measure satisfaction, Aspen University collects survey responses in each of its courses with the "End-of- Course Survey." In addition to other questions, this survey

contains the following three questions:

- Did you achieve, or will you have achieved upon completing your studies, the goals you had when you started the course or program?
- Would you recommend these studies to a friend?
- All things considered, were you satisfied with your studies with us?

The survey containing these questions is distributed to each student completing a course, and data is collected and analyzed regularly, the timeframe used to collect the data, and the number and percent of “Yes” answers to the three questions listed above.

Health (4 Credits)

DPH840 - Strategic Planning and Financing in Public Health (4 Credits)

DPH850 - Health Information Management and Informatics (4 Credits)

50 Immersion Hours Requirement for each course listed above.

## Learning with Technology

Professors/Faculty Chairs go through training and orientation of the platform before being assigned to a class and receive a Faculty Handbook outlining the use of the platform and instructional expectations. Each student receives an orientation from an advisor and general guidelines in the “Getting Started” section of each course. All students are offered a New Student Orientation that is initiated by Academic Advising and student are encouraged to schedule the orientation prior to starting a course.

ProjectConcert is a system that will help with:

- electronically track and manage immersion hours in your courses
- schedule and report on evaluations
- create student portfolios
- track documents and expiration dates

DrPH Students will enter immersion hours, required forms, and evaluations while in the following courses:

DPH801 - Health Determinants, Disparities, Behavior & Promotion (4 Credits)

DPH820 - Public Health Policy & Advocacy (4 Credits)

DPH810 - Advanced Epidemiology in Public Health (4 Credits)

DPH870 - Evidence-based Practice & Research Methods in Public Health (4 Credits)

DPH830 - Global Public Health Education (4 Credits)

DPH860 - Advanced Biostatistics in Public Health (4 Credits)

DPH805 - Organizational & Systems Leadership in Public



# Practice Project and Preceptorship

All students in an Aspen University Doctoral program are required to successfully complete the DrPH Project, which entails producing a DrPH project that is approved by the DrPH Project Team appointed by Aspen University. The DrPH courses provide a comprehensive template for producing the DrPH project. A DrPH Project is a record of original activity conducted by the student in contribution to earning a Doctoral degree. The DrPH Project is scholarly work based on a combination of existing research and an original project that contributes to the body of human knowledge and field of practice. It demonstrates the Doctoral Student can collect, analyze, and report data based on critical, analytical, and synthesis skills. Each Doctoral Student must write a DrPH Project that presents the results of a project carried out by the student. An appropriate project involves a substantive piece of original innovative work grounded in an appropriate body of literature. It is relevant to the Public Health field as practiced in the past, the present, or in the potential future. It presents a significant contribution or advancement in that field.

It is the student's responsibility to work with their DrPH Project Team as determined appropriate in collaboration with the Faculty Chair. The student bears full responsibility for a successful outcome. As additional expert resources and guidance are believed necessary, the student explores and acquires any such assistance. As a student enters the last stages of the doctoral program, the expectation is that they need little help in conducting their project, writing the Project Manuscript, or obtaining the advice needed to complete the DrPH journey. Doctoral students are scholars in the making, with clear goals, adequate investigative tools, solid research agendas, and the determination to achieve the goals they set forth in the beginning stages of the doctoral journey. The DrPH Project Team will accept the resulting DrPH Project for completion of the DrPH requirements after a final review and approval. Training, editing, and other forms of assistance are acceptable and recommended, but under no circumstances may someone produce a DrPH Project other than the student.

## Immersion Course & Immersion Hours Instructions

## DrPH Writing Style

The DrPH writing style is guided by the most recent edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA). Aspen University recognizes the 7th edition. The APA writing style is followed consistently throughout the program in matters of form and style. Of critical importance, sources must be cited and properly referenced.

The DrPH Project Manuscript includes a title page, acknowledgements, abstract, table of contents, and list of tables and figures, followed by five distinct chapters:

- Introduction,
- Literature Review,
- Methodology,
- Results, and
- Conclusions and Recommendations,
- Followed by references and appendices.

A detailed DrPH Project Manuscript outline is available in the DrPH Lounge.

## DrPH Project Team

Each doctoral student must work with a qualified DrPH Project Team (formally called DrPH Committee) that is knowledgeable in methods of graduate-level study and research, as well as in the subject area concerned. In addition to the student, the 3-person DrPH Project Team is comprised of the Faculty Chair (Chair), Faculty Reviewer (Content Specialist), and Independent Reviewer. The student will also need a site/clinical preceptor and the preceptor may serve as the Independent Reviewer. The Faculty Chair is the course instructor for all DrPH Project courses, acting as the Project Chair for the student. The Faculty and Independent Reviewers must have appropriate understanding and interest in the topic of the DrPH research project. All members of the DrPH Project Team must hold a doctoral degree and one member must hold a Doctor of Public Health Practice degree, ensuring that all members of the DrPH Project Team are well versed on doctoral-level work as well as in the field of the program.

The student is permitted to select the DrPH Project Team members in consultation with the Faculty Chair, but Aspen University Program Leadership (DrPH Program Coordinator, Deans, and Director) makes the final decisions. To select Faculty and Independent Reviewers, the student sends a statement of request to the Faculty Chair along with the rationale for selecting the individual.

The professional relationship between the student and the DrPH Project team is characterized by enthusiasm, professionalism, and regular and reciprocal communication. In the ideal relationship between the DrPH Project Team members, the student receives constant, timely, and quality feedback on progress. This type of interaction and feedback can be accomplished in a variety of ways. However, the emphasis of interactions and feedback is on both the frequency of interactions and quality feedback to maintain a dialogue on the issues and research questions raised by the student's investigative work.

The Faculty Chair assists the student in formulating the DrPH Project Team and oversees its progress. The Faculty Chair also serves the roles of supervisor, advisor, director, counselor, coach, role model, guide, collaborator, facilitator, advocate, chair and the like. The Faculty Chair supervises the immersion experience and communicates with the preceptor and student during the Project and related immersion hours. At the beginning of each DrPH Project course and the Faculty Chair will have a required teleconference with the preceptor and the student to discuss project objectives, goals and immersion activities to provide clarity to the student and the preceptor at the beginning, middle, and end of the course.

The Faculty Chair facilitates communications and resource exchanges among all members of the DrPH Project Team and is accountable for the DrPH Project Team's work. The Faculty Chair provides guidance and supervision for the entire DrPH process, timely and practical reviews including specific constructive critiques to the student, communicates appropriate concerns to the student, and communicates with all the members of the DrPH Project Team and Aspen University administrators. The Faculty Chair is responsible for contacting and chairing meetings of the full DrPH Project Team. When there is a difference of opinion or conflict, the Faculty Chair negotiates with all DrPH Project Team members and the student.

The Faculty Chair serves as a guide and consultant to the student throughout the DrPH process and ensures the integrity of Aspen University's DrPH guidelines. The Faculty Chair is an expert in providing guidance to the

student about research including the research topic, problem statement, current literature review, research design and planning, data collection, analysis and reporting, DrPH document preparation, and the like to maximize the student's progress for successful and ethical doctoral research. The Faculty Chair maintains documentation of all communication within the DrPH Project Team, ensuring that all necessary forms are completed, signed, and submitted to Aspen University administrators.

If the Faculty Chair is unable to serve for the entire duration of the student's DrPH project, the Program Director will arrange for a replacement Faculty Chair. Any additional human resources should be discussed with the Faculty Chair. Such resources might comprise a DrPH editor, academic advisor, or a subject matter expert (SME), such as a statistics expert. All individuals associated with the DrPH process should be acknowledged for their contribution. Any expense incurred by the student for external services rendered is managed independently between the student and the service provider. Hiring a writer or buying a completed DrPH product is not acceptable and grounds for termination.

## Institutional Review Board

Aspen University established an Institutional Review Board (IRB) in 2013 to protect the interests of human participants in research. The primary role of the IRB is the review of all human subject research conducted at Aspen University to ensure that the research fulfills the requirements of the Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP), meeting the requirements of OHRP's Division of Compliance Oversight (DCO) reviews institutional compliance with the federal regulations governing the protection of human subjects in Title 45 Part 46 of the Code of Federal Regulations (45CFR46). Also see Appendix F: IRB Policies, Regulations, and Rules. Aspen University IRB follows the OHRP IRB Guidebook, which provides a basic understanding of the background and purposes of the IRB review system. Aspen University's DrPH faculty and students complete the CITI training, and IRB approval processes to demonstrate compliance with federal regulations.

Federal regulations require that researchers give special consideration to protecting the welfare of certain subjects. Special provisions exist for research involving:

- Children and Minors
- Prisoners
- Pregnant Women and Fetuses
- Institutionalized Mentally Disabled
- Elderly
- Economically or Educationally Disadvantaged

In general, these regulations allow IRBs to approve research with populations that are of minimal risk or that benefit the subjects directly. Review and approval of research involving vulnerable (protected) populations may require additional time if outside expertise is needed for further evaluation of the study.

Before the student may begin to collect and analyze data, the application to the IRB must be submitted and approved by the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Only the IRB has the authority to approve research. The student is responsible to acquire IRB approval to ensure that the research is conducted in the appropriate manner and that the participants meet selection and eligibility requirements. The IRB reviews research proposals based on the following queries:

- Are the risks to subjects and protected groups minimized?
- Are the risks reasonable in relation to anticipated benefits?
- Is the selection of subjects equitable?

The student ensures that the participant's informed consent is appropriately obtained and that the study is properly designed and scientifically valid. Informed consent is obtained before data is collected. Once data is collected, analyzed, and documented, the student is responsible to provide the participants with a copy of the DrPH Project, providing the participants with an opportunity to accept or reject the manner in which their data is applied. Participants reserve the right to retract their data up to the time of formal publication.

The IRB at Aspen University considers that the human participants (subjects) of the study are protected by demonstrating:

- Respect for persons (volunteers choose whether to participate in the research);
- Beneficence (doing no harm to research subjects);

- Justice (human participants have the right to be aware of the potential risks of research) as defined by the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects.

The student must submit:

- a copy of the approved proposal defense,
- a copy of the IRB approval form, and
- the application to the IRB for its approval.

The DrPH Project proposal provides a thorough and detailed overview of the researched topic, the problem statement including hypotheses or research questions, review of the relevant research literature, and a complete description of the research methodology.

This is the essence of Chapters 1-3 of the DrPH Project. The necessary IRB forms are provided in Appendix C: IRB Application Form; Appendix B: IRB Approval Form; Appendix D: Informed Consent Letter; and Appendix E: Informed Consent Form.

The DrPH Project Team in conjunction with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviews and approves a student's DRPH Project proposal. The proposal must include IRB approval and the final approval of the Chairperson for the IRB Committee.

## Oral DRPH Proposal Defense

Development of the DrPH Project manuscript is accomplished as a part of the requirements within the DrPH Project Immersion courses. Under direction of the Faculty Chair, the student develops a research proposal for submission and approval by the DrPH Project Team. The proposal provides a thorough description of the proposed study, following proposal guidelines as directed by the Faculty Chair. The student presents the proposal to the DrPH Project Team in an DrPH zoom meeting. All project team members must be present, and the defense be recorded. Upon the DrPH Project Team's approval of the proposal, the student is authorized to begin the study.

The Faculty Chair issues written approval to the student using the approval form provided in Appendix A: Approval of the DRPH Proposal.

### Final Oral DRPH Defense

The Final Oral DrPH Defense is the last formal step in the DrPH process. It is a requirement all committee members

are present for the Final Oral DRPH Defense. The Doctoral student produces and presents the DrPH Project before the DRPH Project Team via a DrPH zoom meeting and recorded. The DrPH Project Team determines the general format of the DrPH, and the abstract based on the University's general design guidelines. The Faculty Chair should ensure that the DRPH is in final form before requesting evaluations from the other members of the DrPH Project Team. Any Professor or student affiliated with Aspen University may attend but should refrain from participating in the defense process.

The student arranges the Final Oral DrPH Defense teleconference and solicits and coordinates the availability of the DrPH Project Team members. Based upon the student's presentation, one of three votes may be awarded:

- Accepted with no Changes
- Accepted with Changes
- Acceptance Denied

Where changes are required, the student must make any iteration in a timely manner and submit the final copy to the Faculty Chair. Where acceptance is denied or the student has not met the allotted timeframe, the student must retake DrPH courses. This option may only be exercised once.

Following the successful oral defense, the Faculty Chair submits the Approval of the DrPH with all of the project team's signatures and copy of the final DrPH manuscript to the Program Director with a recommendation for final approval. The Faculty Chair issues written approval to the student using the approval form provided in Appendix B: Approval of the DrPH. If the decision of the DrPH Project Team is not unanimous, the case is referred to the Deans for resolution. If the decision of the DrPH Project Team is a failure recommendation, the Faculty Chair, Program Director and Deans formulate a course of action that may include re-registration in DrPH courses.

The DrPH Project Team must evaluate the DrPH and recommend the awarding of the doctoral degree only if the DrPH is judged to demonstrate the following qualities. The DrPH should demonstrate a host of characteristics, including:

- Establish a historical context for the presentation of an innovative and creative approach to the problem.
- Demonstrate understanding of the problem as revealed by analysis and synthesis of a broad

literature base.

- Articulate clarity in composition and careful documentation.
- Merit publication in refereed journals or form the basis of a book or monograph.
- Detail the design of the study so that other scholars can build on it in subsequent work.
- Prepare the author to assume a position within the profession.

## Dissemination the DrPH Project Manuscript

Aspen University holds to the tradition that students are obligated as a member of the scholarly community to make their project available to interested persons. Scholarship in Public Health can be defined as those activities that systematically advance the teaching, research, and practice of Public Health as well as the integration such as presentations; and policy proposal designed to influence organizations or governments.

**Upon final acceptance of the DrPH Project, the student should submit the manuscript for publication in a peer-reviewed journal or present at a conference.**

If the DrPH is the result of a collaborative research effort, the project should be structured in such a way that the Doctoral Student has supplied a major effort. The contributions of the student and the other collaborators must be clearly identified. The student is responsible for defending the DrPH. Published articles authored by the student

and based on research conducted for the DrPH study may be included in the DrPH, provided the published work is logically connected and integrated into the DrPH in a coherent manner. The student must be clearly delineated as the sole or primary author of the published work.

## Evaluation of Immersion Site and Preceptor

The student's evaluation of their experience and the

expertise of the preceptor is required at the end of each immersion experience. The Site Evaluation and Preceptor Evaluation must be completed electronically in to ProjectConcert.

The evaluations will appear in Week 7 of the course and will remain open for three weeks.

# Appendices

**Appendix A: Approval of the DrPH Proposal**

**Appendix B: Approval of the Final Project**

**Appendix C: IRB Application Form**

**Appendix D: Informed Consent Letter (Example)**

**Appendix E: Informed Consent Form (Example)**

**Appendix F: IRB Policies, Regulations, and Rules**

**Appendix G: Verification of Precepted Master's Degree Hours**

**Appendix H: Doctor of Public Health (DrPH) Internship Site Agreement**

**Appendix I: Preceptor Agreement**

**Appendix J: Student Profile**

**Appendix K: DrPH Preceptor Evaluation – Completed Electronically in Project Concert**

**Appendix L: DrPH Site Evaluation – Completed Electronically in Project Concert**

**Appendix M: DrPH Student Performance Evaluation**

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