

How to choose between a PhD and a DrPH degree in Epidemiology at the Mailman School of Public Health: Frequently asked questions and a comparative table.

PhD Program. *The overarching goal of the Columbia University PhD program in epidemiology is to train students for careers as leaders in research and training in academic, not-for-profit, clinical, governmental and private sector settings. The PhD offers a rigorous methods sequence of advanced courses designed to prepare doctoral students for a career in which they develop, implement, and disseminate research in their fields. Our graduates have achieved prominence as faculty in academic institutions, in national and local public health institutions, as clinical epidemiologists, researchers in national and international NGOs, and in industry.*

DrPH Program. *The Columbia University Doctor of Public Health degree program in epidemiology is a recently developed advanced professional degree which aims to both develop leadership and management skills to support public health practice and to provide solid expertise in epidemiologic research. The DrPH is designed for public health practitioners and clinicians with experience working in any of a wide range of public health settings (governmental, not-for-profit, clinical, academic and private sectors). The DrPH program in epidemiology offers a core curriculum shared across the five Mailman School departments offering the DrPH degree as well as requirements specific to developing skills in epidemiology. The core curriculum and an advanced practicum provide training in the skills and expertise important to advanced public health professional development that is required by the US Council for Education in Public Health (CEPH). These skills, defined as competencies by CEPH, fall into the following categories: data and analysis; leadership, management and governance; policy and programs; education and workforce development. The Mailman department of epidemiology also requires additional training in epidemiologic approaches. DrPH students in epidemiology benefit by being members both of a cohort of all DrPH students in Mailman as well as members of a cohort of epidemiological doctoral students which includes the PhD students.*

Here are some frequently asked questions about the DrPH and PhD programs in Epidemiology:

- 1. How do I choose between a DrPH and a PhD in Epidemiology?** *This depends on your future career goals (please see FAQ #3) and what skills you would like to develop during your training. The Department of Epidemiology offers doctoral training through two different degrees, the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) and the Doctor of Public Health (DrPH). Either degree can be a route to a career in academic public health, clinical epidemiology or public health leadership. The PhD is oriented towards preparing students specifically for academic research careers in epidemiology, while the DrPH provides professionals with experience in public health or a clinical field with the skills and competencies to excel as effective leaders in public health practice grounded in coursework in evidence based, epidemiologic research. The PhD offers a rigorous methods sequence of advanced courses designed to prepare doctoral students for a career in which they develop, implement, and disseminate research in their fields.*
- 2. Can I apply to both the DrPH and the PhD in Epidemiology at the same time?** *No, you may only apply to one of the two programs. If you admitted to the PhD you may not switch to the DrPH (and vice versa).*

3. **Does having a DrPH vs. PhD degree in Epidemiology limit my future career choices?** *If you are set on pursuing an academic research career, the PhD degree is more appropriate. If you would like to work in implementation research or public health practice at a leadership level typically in departments of health, NGOs), then the DrPH is more appropriate to pursue. However, our graduates have gone into a whole range of careers that use epidemiologic skills regardless of what degree they pursue.*
4. **Are mentorship opportunities limited to DrPH faculty committee members or PhD faculty committee members depending on what degree I choose to study?** *No. Both our DrPH and PhD students work with a wide range of faculty mentors.*
5. **Can I work with faculty mentors outside the epidemiology department for my Integrative Learning Experience (ILE) and/or dissertation?** *Yes, given the specific requirements within the [DrPH handbook](#) and the [PhD guidelines](#).*
6. **Can I switch to the DrPH program if I start in the PhD program or vice versa?** *No. This is not possible.*
7. **What represents a strong applicant for the DrPH program and the PhD program?**

PhD: *Successful applicants to the PhD program will have*

- *Demonstrated commitment to public health with a clear understanding of what epidemiology entails, and research interests and career goals appropriate to a career linked to epidemiology.*
- *Explained how their background experience qualifies them for admission to the program in their Statement of Purpose*
- *A strong academic record, particularly in epidemiology and biostatistics, relevant work or trainee experience. This must be supported by persuasive recommendations from their academic or work supervisors and mentors, documenting their capacity to undertake the challenging courses and research engagement required for independent thinking and leadership in research. Coursework in mathematics (e.g., algebra, calculus) and/or statistics and prior courses in epidemiology is required. A strong background in the natural and/or social sciences is highly recommended.*
- *The ability to write clearly and persuasively as demonstrated on the statement of purpose and the required writing sample*

DrPH: *Successful applicants to the DrPH program will have*

- *Documentation of initiative and leadership in PH programs or projects, policy development, research (Resume and persuasive recommendations from academic and work supervisors and mentors).*
- *At least 2 years Public Health related work including service, research whether compensated or voluntary. Part time work while a student is acceptable.*

- Successfully completed an MPH with at least two methods courses in epidemiology and two in biostatistics.
 - Demonstrated evidence of writing ability (in the statement of purpose and the required writing sample).
 - Demonstrated clear interest in further training in Epidemiology as part of a public health professional career (in or outside the University).
8. **How long will the DrPH and PhD program take to complete?** *The DrPH is expected to be completed within 5 years of matriculation, with a maximum of 7 years of matriculating. The PhD is expect to be completed within 5 to 6 years of matriculating, with a maximum of 9 years of matriculating.*
9. **Am I required to have worked in the field of epidemiology or public health to be accepted into the DrPH or PhD program?** *The DrPH requires prior work experience in the field of epidemiology or public health. The PhD does not require prior work experience, however, a strong applicant will have worked in the field of epidemiology or public health prior to applying to the program. Both degrees would expect applicants to have prior coursework in epidemiology and biostatistics. See the answers to question 7.*
10. **Is my degree in epidemiology at Columbia Mailman School of Public Health funded?** *For students matriculating in 2021. The Department will cover tuition, fees and insurance costs for both the DrPH and PhD programs for up to 5 years. In addition, the Department ensures a stipend and/or salary for the first five years of the degree. For more specifics, please consult the guidelines or discuss with the program directors.*

Table Delineating Differences in the PhD and DrPH degrees in Epidemiology*

	DrPH Degree in Epidemiology	PhD Degree in Epidemiology
Program Directors	Leslie Davidson, MD, MSc Lld1@cumc.columbia.edu	Jeanine Genkinger, PhD jg3081@cumc.columbia.edu
Director of Academic Programs	Liliane Zaretsky lz3@cumc.columbia.edu	Liliane Zaretsky lz3@cumc.columbia.edu
Student Representatives	Damemarie Paul dp2971@cumc.columbia.edu	Precious Esie Pie2104@cumc.columbia.edu Domonique Reed Dmr2204@cumc.columbia.edu
Application to Program	SOPHAS	SOPHAS
Prior Degree Requirement for Acceptance into Program	MPH	Master’s degree in epidemiology or public health with prior coursework in epidemiology or biostatistics. Individuals who have earned a doctoral degree in a program that does not confer a master’s degree (e.g., MD, JD) are also eligible,

		although prior experience or training in epidemiology is expected
Credits	36 credits	6 Residence units**
Requirements	Core Curriculum and requirements outlined in the DrPH Handbook section 4 *	Methods Sequence
Cross Departmental Core Requirement	Yes	No
Practicum Requirement	Yes	No
Qualifying Exams	Portfolio development Oral Exam	Methods Exams Foundation Essay
Culminating Project	Integrative Learning Experience (ILE)	Dissertation

*Please see the Epidemiology [DrPH handbook](#) and the [PhD guidelines](#) for further details

*Information current for 2021-2022

** We give two residence units of advanced standing for the MPH/MS degrees and three units of advanced standing for an MD or prior doctoral degree