

# POPULATION HEALTH SCIENCES, MS

Population health is an interdisciplinary field that integrates clinical care and public health practices to prevent, reduce and manage human disease. Population health is particularly interested in the social determinants of health outcomes, and why the distribution of social health determinants is different between population groups. The changing nature of health care due to population shifts and policy reform has created a rising demand for a graduate degree in Population Health. Graduates of the MS program are trained to address the health needs of diverse communities and are equipped with data-driven strategies to help transform health care.

Both in-person and online program options are offered. Our in-person program attracts a small cohort of students desiring an intensive 1-year experience to prepare them for additional graduate educational opportunities, such as medical school or PhD programs. The online program allows individuals across the country to pursue a degree while working full time. Both the in-person and online programs allow us to train future and current health care practitioners in data analytics, research methods, and evidence-based approaches to combating health disparities. Population health is an interdisciplinary field, and our degree is beneficial for future and current health professionals, health systems administrators, and others interested in health outcomes research, evidence-based care, and health system redesign.

## Admission Requirements

The GRE or MCAT is not required for admission. Please note that for applicants with a GPA below a 3.0, an admission test score is strongly recommended to be considered for admission. International applicants will need to meet other requirements established by the Graduate School.

Application Requirements: Academic transcripts from all institutions attended where 15 or more credit hours were earned, three letters of recommendation, curriculum vitae, and statement of purpose

See the Admission Criteria section of this catalog for more information.

## Curricular Requirements

This program has a thesis and a non-thesis option. Candidates under the thesis option will complete 18 semester hours of core coursework, 6 hours of elective coursework, and 6 hours of thesis research hours (POPH 599 Thesis Research). Candidates under the non-thesis option will complete 18 semester hours of core coursework, 9 hours of elective coursework, and 3 hours of a "capstone" experience (POPH 595 Population Health Applications).

Population Health Sciences, MS		Hours
<b>CORE Courses</b>		<b>18</b>
POPH 520	Essentials of Population Hlth	3
POPH 521	Health Policy & Planning	3
POPH 522	Biostatistics	3
POPH 523	Basic Epidemiology	3
POPH 524	Health Economics	3
POPH 525	Health Outcomes Research	3
<b>Electives</b>		
POPH 530	Introduction to Medical Care	3
POPH 531	IP Health Communication	3
POPH 532	Healthcare Finance & Reimb	3
POPH 533	Healthcare Quality&Informatics	3

POPH 535	Data Management	3
POPH 536	Intro. to Qualitative Methods	3
POPH 622	Multivar Meth Hlt Stats	3
POPH 623	Advanced Epidemiology	3

**Thesis Option** **Hours**

**Core Courses** **18**

**Electives (6 hours from the list above)** **6**

**Thesis Research**

POPH 599 Thesis Research 6

**Total Hours** **30**

**Non-Thesis Option** **Hours**

**Core Courses** **18**

**Electives (9 hours from the list above)** **9**

**Capstone Experience**

POPH 595 Population Health Applications 3

**Total Hours** **30**

## Transfer Credit

Students may transfer in a maximum of 6 credit hours. Students are recommended to submit graduate coursework for transfer credit evaluation before the end of their first semester in the program.

Graduate School-wide transfer policies.

## Comprehensive Exam/Capstone

There is no comprehensive exam. Students will complete a thesis (Plan I) or a non-thesis experience (Plan II).

## Plan I - Thesis Process Requirements

The thesis degree completion option requires at least 6 credit hours of POPH 599. The purpose of the thesis is to investigate an original population health question and to contribute new knowledge back to the field of population health. The investigation should be grounded in proper research design and a solid understanding of the healthcare system. Students should complete all core courses before starting their thesis work. In rare circumstances, the student's advisor and Graduate Program Director can approve registration for CHS 599 before all core courses are completed. The thesis involves preparation of a research paper that is of publishable quality and a formal presentation defending the work. Information about the thesis proposal approval process can be found in the program handbook.

A thesis committee must consist of at least three Graduate Faculty appointed by the dean of the Graduate School. The Committee Chair must be a full or associate member of the Graduate Faculty. One member must be from outside the student's major department. The majority of the thesis committee must be full-time regular University of Alabama faculty. If the outside member is not a full or associate member of the UA Graduate Faculty (e.g., a highly qualified person from another university, a business, or industry), the graduate dean needs to appoint that member by approving Affiliate Graduate Faculty status for the specific purpose of serving on the student's thesis committee. Unless there are extraordinary circumstances meriting approval by the graduate dean before the final oral defense of the thesis, all members of the thesis committee must attend the defense.

The candidate must give members of the examining committee a minimum of two weeks to read the thesis before the date of the final oral examination. All members must agree that the student is ready for the final oral thesis defense. A final oral thesis defense is required of all students completing a thesis. The final oral thesis defense is the culminating experience in the master's program. As such, all members of the thesis committee are required to attend and participate in real time. Virtual attendance via interactive video or teleconference is permitted for off-campus external committee members. Students enrolled in the main campus program are expected to participate in graduate oral examinations in person and on campus. In the event that requiring the student to be in person and on campus for the presentation would cause hardship to the student, the committee chair and the graduate program director may approve virtual participation. The student should clearly outline the extenuating circumstances leading to this need. The student and all committee members must adhere to the Graduate School's requirements for virtual participation. Students in the online program may defend their thesis virtually and are not required to travel to Tuscaloosa. The thesis defense is conducted publicly and is open to all students and faculty in the Department of Community Medicine and Population Health.

For formatting guidance, follow the UA Graduate School electronic thesis instructions. A "journal-format thesis" is acceptable. Such a thesis follows the format of a particular journal in which the student and advisor want the thesis to be published. To prepare a journal-format thesis, the student uses the journal's "information for authors" or similarly titled guidelines in conjunction with the Graduate School's Student Guide to Preparing Electronic Theses and Dissertations. All theses are submitted electronically rather than on paper. See the Graduate School's homepage for a link to information on Electronic Theses and Dissertations (ETD) for details. Theses must comply with the regulations set out in A Student Guide to Preparing Electronic Theses and Dissertations, available on the Graduate School's website.

## **Plan II - Non-Thesis Process Requirements**

Candidates for the master's degree under Plan II must earn a minimum of 30 semester hours of coursework credit of which 3 semester hours is a practicum experience (POPH 595). The practicum is a planned, supervised, and evaluated work experience that compliments the student's classroom education, and allows them the opportunity to apply the lessons learned in their course work. The practicum experience is designed to enhance student's professional experience in the field of population health and is key to a comprehensive understanding of population health in clinical settings. Students are required to complete 24 credit hours, including all core courses, before enrolling in POPH 595. Students must have an approved practicum proposal before they will be allowed to register for this course. Information about the practicum proposal approval process can be found in the program handbook. In the case of practicum projects that involves the use of human subjects in any way, the student must consult with the Practicum Director about the potential for IRB approval before beginning their coursework.

During the practicum experience, students will work under the supervision of their Practicum Director and Site Preceptor, who agree to supervise the practicum experience. Decisions on the nature, site, specific objectives, and activities of the practicum are arrived at following discussions and agreements amongst the student, the Practicum Director, and the Site Preceptor. The student and Practicum Director will also identify two additional Community Medicine and Population Health

faculty that will serve on the practicum committee. These faculty will provide additional content expertise to the student.

The practicum experience should demonstrate mastery of at least three of the course competencies in the Population Health program. The student is responsible for completing 120 hours under the guidance of their preceptor and is required to document their completed hours on a regular basis. The practicum experience culminates in a final presentation and creation of an artifact that is agreed upon by the student and the practicum committee (eg, publication, grant submission, quality improvement activity, etc). The practicum presentation is conducted publicly and is open to all students and faculty in the Department of Community Medicine and Population Health. All members of the practicum committee are required to attend and participate in real time. Students enrolled in the main campus program are expected to participate in graduate oral examinations in person and on campus. In the event that requiring the student to be in person and on campus for the presentation would cause hardship to the student, the committee chair and the graduate program director may approve virtual participation. The student should clearly outline the extenuating circumstances leading to this need. The student and all committee members must adhere to the Graduate School's requirements for virtual participation. Students in the online program may present virtually and are not required to travel to Tuscaloosa.

## **Time Limits for Degree Completion Requirements**

Graduate School-wide time limit policy.

## **Student Progress Requirement**

The Population Health program requirements for maintaining good academic standing supplement the Graduate School requirements. Students who are not in good academic standing may lose fellowships, assistantships, other funding support, or may be dismissed from the program. Students must be in good academic standing, which means having a GPA of at least a 3.0 in all graduate work, before progressing to their thesis or practicum project. Students not in good academic standing at the conclusion of their required and elective coursework for the program will have one semester to remove their Academic Warning or they may be dismissed from the program due to insufficient progress towards completing their degree. When warranted by course scheduling restrictions, such as when a course that needs to be repeated is only offered once a year, students can be given a longer time frame to remove their Academic Warning. Students that are dismissed from the program will not be eligible for readmission to the program. In addition to the relevant academic thresholds, a student's standing with the program is also contingent on compliance with the Code of Student Conduct and adherence to the Capstone Creed.

Graduate School-wide policies.

## **Academic Misconduct Information**

All acts of dishonesty in any work constitute academic misconduct. This includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication of information, misrepresentation and abetting any of the above. The Academic Misconduct Disciplinary Policy will be followed in the event that academic misconduct occurs. Students should refer to the Office of Academic Affairs' page on Academic Misconduct: Graduate School-wide academic misconduct information.

## **Withdrawals and Leave of Absence Information**

Students should notify the program director to discuss withdrawals and leave of absences. Please refer to the UA Graduate Catalog for further instructions on how to submit for withdrawal and leave of absences.

Graduate School-wide withdrawals and leave of absence information.

## **Academic Grievances Information**

Graduate School academic grievances information.

## **Grades and Academic Standing**

Graduate School grades and academic standing requirements.

## **Graduate School Deadlines Information**

Graduate School Deadlines.

## **Application for Graduation Information**

Master's Application for Graduation

**Graduate Assistantships:** A limited number of assistantships may be available each academic year. All students admitted to the main campus program are considered for assistantships and are matched to open positions based on the student's academic history, research skills, and other relevant experience and expertise demonstrated in the application materials to the program. A student with a "conditional" admission status is not eligible for an assistantship appointment. To retain an assistantship, a student must demonstrate satisfactory progress in the academic program and satisfactory work as a research assistant. Unsatisfactory academic progress may be defined as the failure to maintain a B average in graduate courses attempted after being admitted to the program, a grade of F in any course in the program, an unsatisfactory thesis or practicum project defense, or any other failure of a required component of the program of study. Students with assistantships will receive a performance evaluation of their research assistant work each semester. Additional information about minimum graduate school qualifications for graduate assistantships can be found here on the Graduate School website.

**Fellowships:** The University of Alabama's Graduate School offers several competitive fellowships that cover tuition, health insurance, and stipends. A list of available fellowships can be found on the Graduate School website. All students admitted to the main campus program are considered for fellowships. The program admissions committee selects exceptional applicants to the program that may be competitive for Graduate Council Fellowships. Applicants interested in a fellowship position should highlight their research interests and skills in their Statement of Purpose. Applicants should also describe specific areas of population health research they wish to pursue if awarded a fellowship. Please note that it is not necessary to contact a prospective faculty mentor for your fellowship during the application process as students are connected to mentors after admittance to the program. Recommendation letters should also speak to the applicant's potential to contribute to population health research.