



The Picture of Master of Public Health Programs in Texas: Demographic Profile, Educational Attainment, and Labor Market Outcomes

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What We Studied

This study provides a comprehensive descriptive analysis of students who had enrolled in and successfully completed Master of Public Health (MPH) programs in Texas over the past two decades. We examine the demographic profiles and financial needs of these students, revealing key trends and patterns within Texas public health education. Additionally, we track graduates' educational trajectories to investigate their pursuit of further higher education, while also analyzing the short-term and long-term changes in their earnings following degree completion. By offering a holistic view of these elements, this study provides valuable insights into the factors that shape the success of MPH graduates in both their educational journeys and professional careers.

How We Analyzed the Data

This study uses data maintained by the ERC, obtained from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), and National Student Clearinghouse (NSC). THECB data describe student demographic and educational characteristics before, during, and after their enrollment in MPH programs. NSC data expand on these data by capturing college enrollment and completion information for students who earned their bachelor's degrees outside of Texas before entering MPH programs within the state, as well as for those who pursued doctoral programs outside of Texas after completing their MPH degrees. Additionally, TWC data offer valuable information on student employment and earnings in the years following MPH program completion. We employ a descriptive research design with longitudinal data to address the proposed research questions, offering a comprehensive overview of Master of Public Health programs in Texas.

Although THECB data specify the degree a student receives at graduation, they do not identify the specific master's program to which students were admitted. Instead, the data indicate the academic majors declared by students upon entry. Based on THECB's graduation records, MPH graduates were concentrated in five academic fields corresponding to CIP codes 26.11 (Biostatistics and Bioinformatics), 26.13 (Ecology, Evolution, Systematics, and Population Biology), 51.07 (Health and Medical Administrative Services), 51.15 (Mental and Social Health Services and Applied Professions), and 51.22 (Public Health). Therefore, for this study, we included all students who declared a major in one of these five core fields, considering them potential MPH degree candidates.

Thus, our study sample included all students admitted to master's degree programs in Texas from Fall 2002 to Fall 2019 who declared one of the five aforementioned academic majors. Recognizing that not all students in these fields earned an MPH degree, we categorized the groups based on their declared majors and the degrees they ultimately received to more accurately analyze their postsecondary education and workforce outcomes. Below are the four study populations defined in this study:

- “MPH students” are students admitted into master’s degree programs in Texas and declared at least one of the five academic majors.
- “MPH graduates” are defined as students who graduated with an MPH degree in Texas
- “MPH-like graduates” are defined as “MPH students” who majored in one of the five academic fields associated with MPH programs but obtained a degree other than an MPH in Texas.
- “MPH-like graduates in Bexar County” are defined as MPH-like graduates from Bexar County

We included students from Bexar County as a key interest group, as the findings from this study will help guide the development and implementation of a new high-quality MPH program in San Antonio, offered by the School of Public Health at UTHSC. As no formal MPH program was available at higher education institutions in San Antonio, we created only the ‘MPH-like graduates’ group for this region.

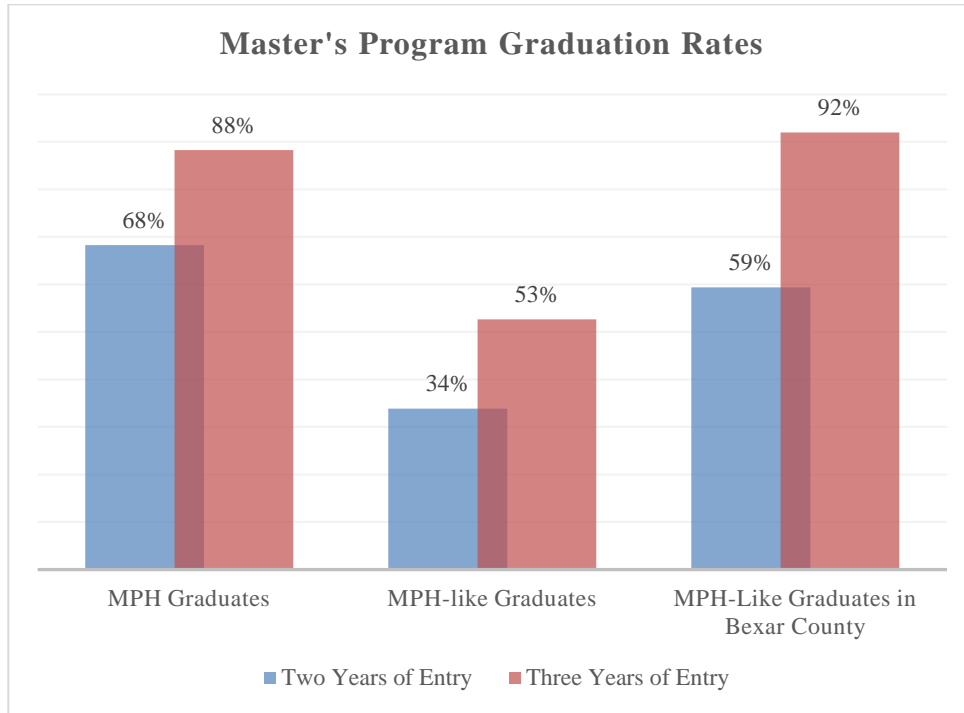
What We Discovered

Two Decades of Public Health Education: Demographics and Financial Aid Characteristics of MPH Students in Texas and Bexar County

- Students who declared one of the five academic majors of MPH programs in Texas (“MPH students”) had an average age of 31 and were predominantly women (72%) and White non-Hispanic (34%). In contrast, in Bexar County, Hispanic students made up the majority of the student population (48%), followed by White non-Hispanic students (32%).
- About one-fourth of these MPH students in Texas received any form of grant-based or loan aid with entry, while the number of students who received financial aid reached 47% within two years of entry. In contrast, four in ten MPH students in Bexar County (45%) received any form of financial aid with entry, and it increased to 67% within two years of program entry.
- 77% of the MPH students in Texas lived in Texas, and 23% were from out-of-state, of which 55% were from foreign countries. In comparison, almost all MPH students in Bexar County (95%) were Texas residents.
- 52% of the MPH students in Texas enrolled full-time at entry, while a higher proportion of students in Bexar County (64%) did it.

Duration of MPH Degree Completion

- MPH graduates spent an average of 2.4 years completing the MPH degree, and nine in ten students achieved it within three years of entry. The likelihood of degree completion within two years of entry of full-time students was twice that of part-time students. On-time graduation rates for out-of-state students were higher than for in-state students, but this gap shrunk substantially in three years.
- Among master’s degree holders who pursued the same academic majors as MPH graduates (“MPH-like graduates”), the two-year and three-year graduation rates were 34% and 53%, respectively. In contrast, MPH-like graduates in Bexar County exhibited significantly higher graduation rates of 59% and 92% within two and three years of entry, surpassing the statewide averages. Additionally, full-time and out-of-state students demonstrated higher graduation rates within the same two- and three-year time frames.
- MPH-like graduates ended up attaining Master of Science (48%), Master of Health Administration (24%), Master of Business Administration (8%), and other degrees.



Further Education Pursuit Among MPH Graduates

- In Texas, 13% of MPH graduates pursued further education immediately after completing their degree, with 40% of these students enrolling in doctoral programs. The rate of pursuing further education within five years of degree completion was fairly close to the rate upon graduation.
- In Texas, 9% of MPH-like graduates pursued further education immediately after degree completion, of which 38% were admitted to doctorate programs. Whereas only 5% of MPH-like graduates in Bexar County pursued further education upon graduation.

Post-MPH Employment

- Six in ten MPH graduates (61%) secured employment in Texas immediately after graduation, with the majority working in Health Care and Social Assistance (31%), Educational Services (30%), Public Administration (12%), Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services (7%), and other employer sectors (20%). Upon graduation, these graduates earned an average annual wage of \$57,378. Although the proportion of MPH graduates employed in Texas decreased to 51% ten years after graduation, their average annual wage doubled to \$117,243 during this period.
- 66% of MPH graduates found employment in Texas right after graduation. Most of them entered the Health Care and Social Assistance sector (46%), followed by Educational Services (20%), Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation (7%), and Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services (6%). 21% of the graduates were employed in other sectors. These graduates earned an average annual wage of \$59,283 upon graduation. Ten years later, the percentage of MPH-like graduates employed in Texas had dropped to 53%, while their average annual wage had nearly doubled to \$116,583 during this time.

Policy Recommendations

A new MPH program was established through a collaboration between the School of Public Health at UTHSC in San Antonio and the University of Texas at San Antonio. The findings from this study offer valuable insights for shaping the program, ensuring it is designed to address student needs and aspirations and align with job market opportunities. The launch of the new MPH program in San Antonio is expected to significantly increase the number of graduates entering the public health workforce, directly addressing the ongoing shortage of skilled public health professionals in Texas. This influx of trained graduates will be instrumental in enhancing the overall health and well-being of Texas citizens by providing a stronger, more capable public health infrastructure. Additionally, these new professionals will be better equipped to respond to sudden and large-scale public health emergencies, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which demonstrates the critical need for a robust, prepared public health workforce. By expanding the pool of qualified workers, the program will not only improve day-to-day public health outcomes but also ensure that Texas is better prepared to confront and manage future crises that could threaten the health and safety of its communities.

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The University of Texas at Austin ERC is a research center and P-20/Workforce Repository site which provides access to longitudinal, student-level data for scientific inquiry and policymaking purposes. Since its inception in 2008, the Texas ERC's goal is to bridge the gap between theory and policy by providing a cooperative research environment for study by both scholars and policy makers. As part of its mission, the ERC works with researchers, practitioners, state and federal agencies, and other policymakers to help inform upon critical issues relating to education today. The views expressed are those of the authors and should not be attributed to The University of Texas at Austin or any of the funders or supporting organizations mentioned herein including the State of Texas. Any errors are attributable to the authors.
