

## Interpretation Guide

### Definitions:

The term “**joint degrees**” applies to all programs of study that combine two separate degrees into a coordinated plan of study. These may also be called combined degrees, concurrent degrees, coordinated degrees, or universities may use other terminology.

Any plan of study publicly listed as available to students in which they can complete two degrees together is considered to be a joint degree, regardless of the terminology used by the university, regardless of the design of the instructional program (e.g., whether credits are shared between the two programs or not), regardless of whether the two degrees are housed in the same university, etc.

When the joint degree combines a public health degree (e.g., MPH) with a non-public health degree (e.g., MD, MSW, MBA), the non-public health degree is referred to as the “**external degree**.” Any instructional credits associated with the external degree are referred to as “**external credits**.”

### Joint.1. Joint bachelor’s degrees with graduate degrees

Line	Criterion Document Language	Interpretation	Tips
20	Students completing a plan of study designed to confer a bachelor’s degree and a graduate public health degree together must complete all courses required for the graduate degree. Graduate-level courses and credits may be used to satisfy the requirements for the bachelor’s degree, in accordance with university policy, but no bachelor’s-level courses or credits may be applied to the requirements of the graduate degree.	<p>Bachelor’s-level courses and credits <b>may not be</b> counted toward the minimum credit requirements for the graduate degree.</p> <p>The definition of a “bachelor’s-level course” includes <b>both</b> of the following types of classes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classes that are classified as bachelor’s-level based on university numbering or classification systems</li> <li>• Classes that are required for all students enrolled in any bachelor’s degree at the university, regardless of the associated course number</li> </ul>	Typically, students take the graduate curriculum, unaltered. The program is shortened by allowing students to enroll in graduate classes before they have completed the undergraduate degree and using those credits toward both degrees’ completion.

Line	Criterion Document Language	Interpretation	Tips
		<p>Cross-listed courses, where both undergraduate and graduate students are enrolled in the same class at the same time, may be counted toward the graduate degree if both of the following are true:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joint students register using the graduate course number</li> <li>• The unit can demonstrate that students are required to complete graduate-level work that differentiates their experience from students who register using the undergraduate course number</li> </ul>	

### Joint.2. Joint master's degrees

Line	Criterion Document Language	Interpretation	Tips
47	This criterion relates to any joint degree that combines another graduate or professional degree with the MPH or an equivalent degree.	<p>Joint degrees that combine an MPH with a bachelor's degree are subject to Criterion Joint.1.</p> <p>“Equivalent” refers to the classification of a degree by CEPH in the unit of accreditation.</p>	<p>Equivalent degrees to the MPH are rare and not applicable in most units of accreditation.</p> <p>“Equivalent” degrees to the MPH sometimes include MSPH degrees. These degrees are subject to all criteria that apply to MPH degrees.</p>
50	Students enrolled in a joint degree that combines the MPH with another graduate public health degree housed within the SPH or PHP complete a plan of study that ensures all CEPH criteria for each of the degrees is met. Public health faculty define a clear rationale for credit sharing across the two degrees.	<p>This portion of the criterion only applies when both degrees that are part of the joint degree program are</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• public health degrees</li> <li>• housed in the unit of accreditation</li> </ul> <p>The plan of study must ensure that all accreditation requirements are met for both degrees.</p>	This portion of the criterion applies to a rare scenario. An example might include an MPH-PhD when the PhD is housed in the unit of accreditation and is in a public health field.
55	Students completing joint degrees that combine the MPH with an external degree program must complete a plan of study designed to provide equivalent public health depth and breadth for the joint degree student as an MPH student who is not enrolled in the joint degree program.	This portion of the criterion applies to joint degrees that combine the MPH with any degree outside the unit of accreditation OR, for SPH that also house non-public health degrees, a	This is the portion of the criterion that applies to nearly all joint degrees CEPH accredits.

		<p>non-public health degree that is housed in the SPH.</p> <p>This criterion requires that a student completing the joint degree receives an education that contains the same public health breadth and depth as any other student receiving the MPH degree from the unit.</p> <p>“Public health” depth and breadth refers to students completing coursework and experiences that align with fundamental public health definitions, including the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• protecting or improving health through organized community effort</li> <li>• assessment, surveillance, policy development, and assurance</li> <li>• focus on the health of populations rather than individuals</li> </ul>	
60	Public health faculty must review the curricula for any external credits used to satisfy the requirements for the public health degree and affirm that the course substitutions address all characteristics included in this criterion.		
64	External credits counted toward public health degrees must have a population-level orientation. External credits may not be counted toward public health requirements if they focus on clinical skills, patient care, etc.	<p>The following foci for external courses are examples that do <i>not</i> provide public health breadth and depth:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• clinical practice with individuals, including communicable disease diagnosis and individual patient counseling on health behaviors</li> <li>• non-health topics that are not primarily aligned with skills needed to practice public health</li> </ul> <p>If the unit believes that an external course has portions with a population-level focus that align with this criterion’s requirements and portions that do not AND wishes to use partial credits from the course toward the public health degree, the unit must</p>	<p>It is important to maintain a record of the specific rationale for determining that external credits have a population orientation and for faculty who are knowledgeable about the external class to be involved in the self-study and site visit process, even if the degree plan is longstanding and/or was developed by faculty who are no longer present. As noted later in this criterion, it is also important that external credits and the plan of study are regularly reviewed and revalidated.</p> <p>While a course focusing on diagnosis and clinical manifestation of infectious disease may not provide</p>

		<p>prepare and maintain a detailed accounting of class hours and/or effort that differentiates the portions and must use only the relevant fraction of the course credits toward the public health degree.</p> <p>The population-level orientation must be justifiable to a reasonable peer reviewer, so the specific rationale applied by public health faculty is particularly important.</p>	<p>appropriate public health breadth and depth, coursework on surveillance of infectious diseases may be appropriate.</p> <p>While a course on counseling individual patients about health behaviors may not provide appropriate public health breadth and depth, coursework on theories of behavior change and their application to developing and implementing population-level programs and policies may be appropriate.</p>
68	<p>External credits used to replace a <i>required</i> public health class require the highest level of scrutiny. Public health faculty must affirm not only that specific skills or competencies associated with the two courses are equivalent, but also that the context and frame of instruction in the external course is equivalent to what the student would receive if they completed the required public health course.</p>	<p>“Required” classes include foundational classes, classes required for the concentration, and “selective” classes where all students must choose one from a list of possible classes.</p> <p>When the required public health class being replaced by an external class is mapped to a foundational competency, the unit is required to document the assignment from the external class in Criterion MPH.2.</p> <p>The “context and frame of instruction” includes concepts such as the type of examples and readings used, frames of reference and theoretical background provided to underpin skills, etc.</p>	<p>For <i>required</i> classes, when classes address similar skills through different frames of instruction, they are not permissible as substitutions. For example</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A public health social marketing class and a business school’s marketing class might address similar core skills and have similar assignments (e.g., developing a marketing campaign), but if the examples and readings in the business school class focus primarily on business and industry, that course would not be an appropriate replacement for a <i>required</i> class. Depending on circumstances, it may be appropriate as a replacement for an <i>elective</i> class.</li> <li>• A research methods class in a graduate nursing program that uses population and community-based readings and examples and addresses the same quantitative and mixed-methods approaches as the equivalent public health research methods</li> </ul>

			<p>class may be an appropriate replacement for a required class.</p> <p>The specific details make each determination unique. As noted above, public health faculty must have a clear and coherent rationale that can be validated by a reasonable peer reviewer.</p>
74	<p>For elective credits, public health faculty must articulate a rationale for accepting the external credits toward the minimum degree requirements; this rationale must be specific to each external course accepted.</p>	<p>The rationale for accepting external credits as electives to satisfy the minimum of 42 semester-credits must address this criterion's themes of population-level orientation and/or skills relevant to work in public health and must ensure that joint degree students receive the same depth and breadth of public health education as other MPH students.</p> <p>If the non-joint MPH requires more than 42 semester-credits or equivalent, this requirement only applies to the elective credits needed to reach a minimum of 42 semester-credits. Documentation for elective credits beyond that (e.g., extra electives required to complete a 45 semester-credit MPH) is not required.</p>	
78	<p>Joint degree students may complete required practice experiences or integrative learning experiences via courses or credits associated with the external program ONLY if all of the following are true:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public health faculty or qualified staff approve the experience before it begins, verifying that the experience is positioned to meet all elements of the criteria for public health practice or integrative experiences.</li> <li>• Public health faculty or qualified staff are involved in supervising and monitoring the experience while it is ongoing.</li> <li>• Public health faculty or qualified staff assess the student's performance, only granting credit for completion if it meets all public health requirements.</li> </ul>	<p>The unit will be required to demonstrate compliance with all components of Criteria [APE criterion] and [ILE criterion]. Public health faculty must be involved at all stages from planning through completion and assessment. Even if the experience satisfies the external program's requirements, public health faculty must make an independent determination on whether it satisfies MPH requirements.</p> <p>This element of the criterion does not apply if students register for the</p>	

		experiences through the MPH program and complete a public health experience in a manner equivalent to all other MPH students.	
89	Even when external courses and credits meet all of the requirements listed above, no more than 12 external semester-credits may be counted toward the 42 semester-credits required for an MPH degree.	<p>All joint degree students must complete at least 30 semester-credits of coursework that has at least one of the following characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• bears the course prefix or code associated with the public health unit</li> <li>• is required (foundational or concentration courses) for a non-joint public health degree in the unit of accreditation</li> </ul> <p>This numeric limitation is <i>in addition to</i> all of the requirements listed above in this criterion; 12 of 42 semester-credits is an absolute numeric limitation <i>even when</i> all other characteristics are met.</p>	Cross-listed classes, where the class has prefixes corresponding to both public health and another discipline, may count toward the 30 semester-credits only if the student registers using the public health prefix or code. If the student registers using the external degree's code, the course counts toward the 12 semester-credit maximum, except in the narrow exception noted immediately below.
93	<p>External credits are not subject to the 12 semester-credit maximum ONLY if they possess both of the following characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Course was designed expressly for public health joint degree students AND only or primarily enrolls public health joint degree students</li> <li>• Taught by faculty with documented public health training and/or experience</li> </ul>	If public health faculty and external degree faculty collaborate to design a course or courses for public health joint degree students and public health joint degree students are the sole or primary audience for the class, the class is not subject to the numeric limitation of 12 external semester-credits even if the student registers using the prefix or code of the external degree program. The course must be taught by faculty with documented public health training and/or experience.	This typically would only be feasible in units that enroll large populations in the joint degree, due to the need for enough students to make a special class for joint degree students viable and offer it regularly.
99	After initial review, public health faculty must regularly reaffirm the content and nature of the external credits counted toward public health degree requirements, as courses and instructors may change over time.	After public health faculty initially determine that external courses and credits counted toward the 42 semester-credit minimum meet all of this criterion's characteristics, they must review the course on an ongoing basis to re-validate that the external	Maintain notes or records of the review to ensure that information is readily available if there are questions during a review process.

		<p>course continues to meet this criterion's characteristics.</p> <p>Typically, this review should occur at least every year; for courses that are more rarely offered, a different review schedule may be appropriate.</p>	
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### Joint.3 Joint highly specialized public health master's degrees and joint public health doctoral degrees

Line	Criterion Document Language	Interpretation	Tips
134	Students completing joint degrees that combine a highly specialized public health master's degree or a public health doctoral degree with another degree program must complete a plan of study designed to provide equivalent public health depth and breadth for the joint degree student as a student who is not enrolled in the joint degree program.	<p>This criterion requires that a student completing the joint degree receives an education that contains the same public health breadth and depth as any other student receiving the highly specialized public health master's or doctoral degree from the unit.</p> <p>Because these types of degrees typically focus on advanced or specialized public health skills, "public health" depth and breadth is specific to each degree program or plan of study. The focus in this criterion is on equivalence across joint- and non-joint public health degree offerings.</p>	<p>Highly specialized master's degrees are typically MS degrees housed in the unit of accreditation.</p> <p>This criterion also applies to all doctoral degrees in the unit of accreditation.</p>
139	Public health faculty must articulate a rationale for accepting external credits toward the minimum degree requirements when the external credits replace the standard requirements for students who are not completing the joint degree. The rationale must focus on ensuring that the joint degree student obtains an equivalent depth and breadth of public health training to students who are not completing joint degrees.	Public health faculty must have a clear and coherent rationale that can be validated by a reasonable peer reviewer.	
145	Public health faculty must regularly reaffirm the content and nature of the external credits counted toward public health degree requirements, as courses and instructors may change over time.	After public health faculty initially determine that external courses and credits meet this criterion's characteristics, they must review the course on an ongoing basis to re-validate that the external course continues to meet this criterion's characteristics. Typically, this review	Maintain notes or records of the review to ensure that information is readily available if there are questions during a review process.

Line	Criterion Document Language	Interpretation	Tips
		should occur at least every year; for courses that are more rarely offered, a different review schedule may be appropriate.	