



**CAREERS IN PUBLIC HEALTH  
AN INTRODUCTION FOR MASTER'S LEVEL STUDENTS**

Entering the professional workforce requires not only a good education, but also job search savvy! You will be competing for top jobs with top people. As with anything, to be successful you need a plan of action. The UAB School of Public Health Career Services Office is committed to assisting you as you prepare for your career in public health.

We will acquaint you with the wide variety of career possibilities through our seminar offerings, as well as through electronic means, such as our website and our email distribution of public health job announcements.

You will also have the opportunity to participate in workshops that teach a variety of career preparedness topics – resume writing, interviewing, utilizing social media in networking. You will also have the opportunity to meet alumni and other public health professionals in our career round table series.

Please take advantage of all these opportunities. Through our offerings you will gain knowledge about the different kinds of jobs available, narrow down the kinds of jobs that you are interested in, and learn the skills needed to successfully secure a job. We look forward to your future career successes as you join over 3000 other UAB School of Public Health alumni working around the world to protect the health and safety of others.



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## UNDERSTANDING THE MARKET

Before you apply for a job, you've got to know what kind of job you want. The profession of public health is very diverse. People work for many different types of organizations doing many different kinds of jobs for a wide range of pay.

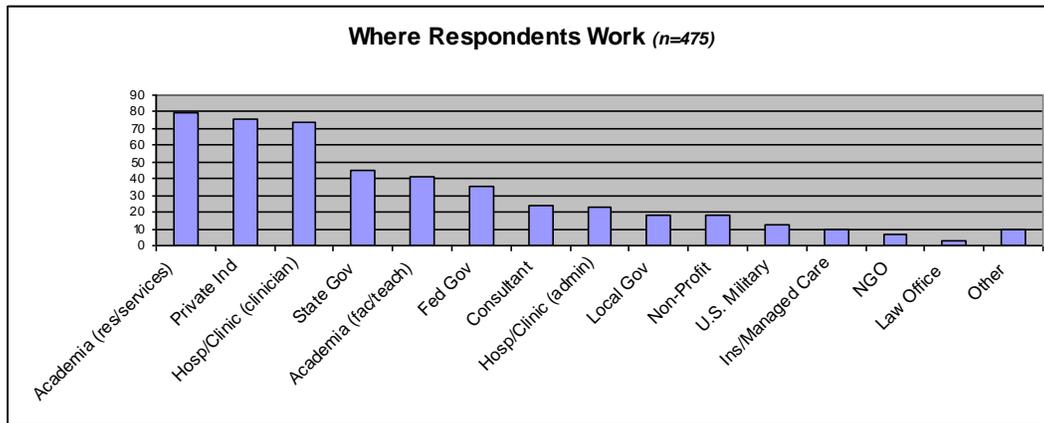
At the beginning of your career preparation, you'll need to research these differences and try to think about what organization best fits your interests, knowledge, skills, and abilities.

### **Employer Types**

Some of the most common organizations that employ public health professionals are:

- Private industry
- Federal, state, local governments
- Consulting
- Insurance/managed care
- Academia
- Hospitals/clinics
- Legal services
- Non profit agencies

This graph from our 2008 comprehensive alumni survey indicates where our alumni work.



### **Disciplines**

As a public health graduate student, you are aware of the different disciplines that make up the profession. In fact, you are studying a particular aspect of public health in one of the School's five departments. The jobs you look for will likely follow particular paths. For example, an epidemiology student often looks for a job as an epidemiologist, a health care organization and policy student might look for a job in health management.

With that said it is important to think about this. Underlying the discipline-related knowledge that you gain in your departmental classes, is your common base of public health knowledge. This is something that all of you will have in common.

For example, by the time you graduate, you will have knowledge and experience in statistics, whether you are studying in the department of environmental health, maternal and child health, etc. All of our students will have a base of knowledge in the fundamental areas of public health: statistics, epidemiology, health behavior, environmental health and health policy.

It's important to consider this because it gives you the option to cross-over into areas outside your departmental discipline, according to your interests, skills and abilities.

For now, however, let's look at the disciplines offered in the UAB School of Public Health and a few actual job titles of our alumni.

**Biostatistics:** *Conducts research in statistical methodology and applications, as well as in fundamental problems of modeling biomedical systems*

Biostatistician, UAB Comprehensive Cancer Center

Biostatistician, Eli Lilly and Company

Research Analyst, HealthCore Inc.

**Environmental Health Sciences:** *Focuses on the biological consequences and control of environmental and occupational hazards*

Senior Industrial Hygienist, 3M Corporation

Environmental Scientist, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Manager of Safety and Health, Alabama Power Company

Compliance Safety and Health Officer, United States Department of Labor Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)

**Epidemiology:** *Conducts study and research in the distribution and determinants of disease in humans*

Epidemiologist, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Director HIV/AIDS Surveillance, Alabama Department of Public Health

Lead Clinical Research Associate, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital

Public Health Analyst, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Center for Global Health, Division of Global HIV/AIDS

**Health Behavior:** *Brings together teaching, research, and service activities to promote healthy lifestyle behaviors within populations*

Community Planning Program Specialist, Florida Department of Health

Director of Health Education, Los Angeles County Department of Health Services

Underage Drinking Prevention Coordinator, DREAMS, Inc.

**Health Care Organization and Policy:** *Provides training and education for those desiring a career in the analysis of health services policy options or in the management of public health services resources*

Health Policy Analyst, U.S. General Accounting Office

CEO, Alacare Home Health & Hospice

Vice President, Field Operations, Arthritis Foundation National Office

Public Health Representative, Vaccines for Children Program, Tennessee Department of Health  
Outreach Coordinator, Susan G. Komen for the Cure

## **Location**

Public health professionals work to protect the health and safety of all people so it's no surprise that jobs are available worldwide. UAB School of Public Health alumni live and work on six of the seven continents of the world (no one in Antarctica-*yet!*). Domestically, we have alumni in 48 states and the District of Columbia.

If you are willing to live “anywhere,” your chances of finding a job are very good. However, the more you narrow down the search, the more difficult it will be to find a particular kind of job in a particular place. For example, if you are a health behavior student and you need to live in Nashville, Tennessee, your chance of finding a job there will be more difficult than your classmate who is willing to take a job anywhere in the U.S. Although there are many health behavior-related jobs in Nashville, the likelihood that there will be a vacancy at the time of your graduation may be slight. Therefore, if you know you need to live in a particular region, state, or city, it's best to start your job search early, at least six to nine months before graduation.

## **Salary**

The salary range for public health workers is extremely wide due to the diversity of jobs, requirements, employers, and locations. Generally speaking, private industry tends to pay more than government which typically pays more than non-profit agencies. It's tempting to put a heavy emphasis on salary, but money is not always the bottom line. Each person needs to consider what is most important to him or herself. To be satisfied with the job you have, even if the pay is less than some other similar jobs, is often more important than making more money and being miserable where you work. It's something to think about.

With that said, and as a point of reference only, the mean beginning salary for 2010-2011 UAB School of Public Health grads with a Master of Public Health degree was \$41,750.

## **RESEARCHING THE MARKET**

You now have basic information on the types of organizations that hire public health professionals, their locations, and average salary. Now it's time to explore real jobs, with descriptions, requirements, locations, and pay. Where do you find that?

### **Dragon Trail and the Job/Fellowship Blog**

As a student of the UAB School of Public Health, you have access to UAB's Career Management site, Dragon Trail. Using your BlazerID and password, log in to Dragon Trail at [www.uab.edu/careerservices](http://www.uab.edu/careerservices). You can apply to positions directly on this website, explore contact information for employers in the system, review upcoming career events, and much more! The School of Public Health also posts job and fellowship opportunities on the School's website at <http://www.soph.uab.edu/careers/joblistings>.

Avoid putting too much emphasis on job titles. Pay more attention to job descriptions and duties. Ask yourself if you have the skills to perform the required tasks. You have many transferable skills that will allow you some flexibility in the job market.

## Websites

You can also learn about jobs by surfing the web. Check out a list of some common public health employment and fellowship links at <http://www.soph.uab.edu/careers/careersearch/employmentsites>. Of course there are many other employers of public health professionals. You can check their employment opportunities by finding their websites through an internet search engine and then navigating to the organization's employment opportunity section. While the web is a good place to check for opportunities, don't neglect making contacts or any opportunities to network.

## Seminars and Workshops

The UAB School of Public Health Career Office offers career seminars and workshops throughout the academic year. The series begins with informational seminars in the fall that introduce our students to the organization types that employ many public health professionals. You'll be able to hear these professionals explain what they look for in employees, explain job requirements and the skills and abilities that they look for. At the end of the presentation, the presenters (many are alumni) are available to answer your questions and discuss in more detail possible employment opportunities within their organization.

## Professional Groups

There's no better way to learn about public health careers than by meeting and speaking with practicing professionals. This is also a great way to build your "network." Take every opportunity to meet these people. Watch for seminars that are occurring at the School, for example, Grand Rounds. Each department has seminars and symposiums which draw in professionals. You can also join a professional organization. Some may have free or discounted student memberships. They may also have local chapters that you can become involved in.

To find out about seminars and symposiums coming up at the School, check the calendar on the front page of our School website.

Following is a list of some state and national organizations that are related to public health along with their web addresses. Visit the sites of interest to you to find out about upcoming conferences, membership, etc.

Academy for Health Services Research and Health Policy: <http://www.ahsrhp.org>  
Alabama Public Health Association <http://www.alphassoc.org/>  
American Association of Health Plans: <http://www.aahp.org/>  
American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging: <http://www.aahsa.org/>  
American Association of Public Health Physicians: <http://www.aaphp.org>  
American College of Healthcare Administrators: <http://www.achca.org>  
American College of Healthcare Executives: <http://www.ache.org>  
American College of Preventive Medicine: <http://www.acpm.org/>  
American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists: <http://www.acgih.org>  
American Dietetic Association: <http://www.eatright.org/>  
American Geriatrics Society: <http://www.americangeriatrics.org/>  
American Health Care Association: <http://www.ahca.org/>

American Industrial Hygiene Association: <http://www.aiha.org>  
American Lung Association: <http://www.lungusa.org/>  
American Public Health Association: <http://www.apha.org>  
American Statistical Association: <http://www.amstat.org>  
Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs: <http://www.amchp.org>  
Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology: <http://www.apic.org>  
Association of Teachers of Maternal and Child Health: <http://www.atmch.org>  
Association of Teachers of Preventive Medicine: [www.atpm.org/](http://www.atpm.org/)  
Global Health Council: [www.globalhealth.org](http://www.globalhealth.org)  
Infectious Disease Society of America: <http://www.idsociety.org/>  
National Association of Community Health Centers: <http://www.nachc.com/>  
National Association of Health Data Organizations: <http://www.nahdo.org/>  
National Center for Health Education: <http://www.nche.org>  
National Commission for Health Education Credentialing: <http://www.nchec.org/>  
National Environmental Health Association: <http://www.neha.org>  
National Forum for Health Care Quality Measurement and Reporting: [www.qualityforum.org](http://www.qualityforum.org)  
National Network for Immunization Information: [www.immunizationinfo.org](http://www.immunizationinfo.org)  
Society for Epidemiologic Research: <http://www.epiresearch.org>  
Society for Nutrition Education: <http://www.sne.org>  
Society for Public Health Education: <http://www.sophe.org/>  
Society of Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry: <http://www.setac.org>

## **WHAT DO EMPLOYERS WANT?**

According to a recent survey conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers, these are the top qualities/skills sought by employers.

1. Communication skills (verbal & written)
2. Strong work ethic
3. Teamwork skills (works well with others)
4. Initiative
5. Interpersonal skills (relates well to others)
6. Problem-solving skills
7. Analytical skills
8. Flexibility/adaptability
9. Computer skills
10. Technical skills

Alumni who participated in the Alumni Career Round Tables spoke of the importance of many of these same skills. Remember, your public health degree demonstrates your knowledge of public health. Generally speaking, then, all new graduates of accredited Schools of Public Health begin on a fairly even playing field. What will set you apart are the skills and abilities that you bring to the table.

## **KNOW THYSELF**

### **Identifying Your Skills and Abilities**

You'll have the degree in public health, but what are the skills and abilities that you'll be bringing to a job? There are three kinds of skills: transferable, job-specific, and self-management. It's a good idea to think about these before you create your new resume and look for a job.

Transferable skills are capabilities that you've developed from past experiences (a job, class, or volunteer role) which translate into skills desired by an employer. For example, the ability to analyze statistics, coordinate a project, evaluate a process, work with children, create a strategic plan, manage a group of people. Transferable skills are usually described using verbs.

Job specific skills have limited transferability. An example of this would be the ability to perform an indoor air quality assessment. This industrial hygiene skill would not be of interest to an employer looking for a health educator. Knowledge of statistical programs (like SAS or SPSS) would be a job specific skill for an epidemiology analyst position.

Self management skills are personal traits and characteristics that would make you a valuable employee to anyone. These are also referred to as soft skills and are typically described using adjectives. They include things like being dependable, hard-working, self-starter, team-player, results-oriented, etc.

Photocopy and use the form at the end of this booklet to discover and document potential skills and abilities that you could bring to an employer. Use this as a reference to help write your cover letter and tweak your resume for each job you apply to.

## **Identifying Your Ideal Job Preferences**

You've learned a bit about what employers look for and you've identified your unique skills and abilities. Now who do you want to demonstrate them to? It should go without saying, but we'll say it anyway. It's important to find a job that suits your interests and personality. That seems reasonable doesn't it? However, many people find themselves in situations that make going to work each day miserable.

You may think a "job is a job." You may also think you need to go for the job that offers the highest salary; after all, you've got bills to pay! Well, here are a few examples of things that you may not consider but could make going to work each day unbearable.

If you're not a "people person" then you probably would not like a job that requires community work, public speaking, etc. Perhaps being stuck in traffic drives you *CRAZY*. Then a job in a city notorious for traffic congestion and/or long commutes is probably not for you. What about money? Perhaps you get a job that pays a great salary, but you find yourself day-after-day in a windowless office writing policies when what you really wanted to do when you got your degree was "hand-on" work in the community (but the pay was low). While money may be a great motivator in the short run, it will soon seem less important if you find yourself in a job that doesn't meet your other needs and sustain your interest.

Many new graduates get anxious when it comes time to find a job. They may feel inclined to take the first thing offered. That is why it is important to begin your job research and search

early as well as finding out a little bit about yourself. Copy and use the form at the end of this booklet to assess your ideal job preferences and to rate jobs that you may be considering.

## **CONSIDER A FELLOWSHIP**

To gain experience and get your foot in the door of many federal agencies, you may want to consider a fellowship after graduating. Fellowships usually pay a professional salary (typically around \$40,000), as well as provide benefits (insurance, vacation, etc.).

A fellowship provides recent graduates the ability to work alongside leaders in the field of public health as well as access to the latest technologies. Check your student email often for fellowship notices. Below you will find some common websites that contain information on fellowships. You can also do an internet search by typing “public health fellowship” in the search engine.

American Association for the Advancement of Science: <http://www.fellowships.aaas.org/>

Association of Schools of Public Health: <http://www.asph.org/document.cfm?page=752>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [www.cdc.gov/Fellowships/](http://www.cdc.gov/Fellowships/)

Global Health Fellows Program: [www.ghfp.net](http://www.ghfp.net)

Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education: <http://www.ornl.gov/orise/educ.htm>

Presidential Management Fellowship Program: <https://www.pmf.opm.gov/>

## **CONCLUSION**

This booklet has given you information on understanding and researching the public health job market and has given you some things to think about when considering the kind of job that best suits you.

Also, the UAB School of Public Health is proud to be a member of the Association of Schools of Public Health and its Employment Council. The council works together to educate and prepare our students and alumni for successful careers in public health. Please feel free to visit the career websites of other member Schools to gain even more career information. You can find a guide to member schools by visiting ASPH’s website (<http://www.asph.org>) and clicking on “Member Schools.”

**WHAT ARE YOUR SKILLS AND ABILITIES?** *Make a list of the skills you have that you believe employers in your field will be looking for (doesn't matter where you gained the skill). (BRING THIS COMPLETED FORM TO THE PUBLIC HEALTH CAREER WORKSHOP IN JANUARY.)*

**Transferable Skills:**

Skill	Where did you get this skill?
<i>Ex: Create strategic plan</i>	<i>A class project</i>

**Job Specific Skills**

Skill	Where did you get this skill?
<i>Ex: Non-profit grant writing</i>	<i>1) internship at the American Cancer Society 2) Non-profit grant writing course</i>

**Self Management (soft) Skills**

Skill	Defense/Proof of Skill
<i>Ex: Hard working</i>	<i>Your resume shows that you worked all through school</i>

**WHAT IS YOUR IDEAL JOB PREFERENCE?**

Title or Function	Salary	Location	Organization size	Scope of responsibility	Management style	Corporate culture	What's important to you

**HOW DOES A PARTICULAR JOB MEASURE UP?**

Title or Function	Salary	Location	Organization size	Scope of responsibility	Management style	Corporate culture	What's important to you

**EVALUATING A PARTICULAR JOB**

(Make copies and for each position you consider, circle your response)

- Do you feel excited/motivated about the job? Y N
  - Would many of your most highly regarded values be met in this position? Y N
  - Are the responsibilities of this position a challenge for you? Y N
  - Is this the type of position that will benefit your career track? Y N
  - Does the salary meet your financial needs and expectations (based on market norms)? Y N
  - Does the benefit package (insurance, vacation, sick leave, etc.) meet your expectations? Y N
  - Regarding salary, if it was lower, would this job still be interesting to you? Y N
  - Will the demands of this position and environment be stressful to you (beyond normal "new job" stress)? Y N
  - Is the type of organization one for which you want to work for a long period of time? Y N
  - Does the corporate culture match your interests and personality? Y N
  - Does the management style seem like a good fit with your work ethic/style? Y N
  - Does the environment in which you would work seem compatible with your personality? Y N
  - Do the types of people (researchers, activists, etc.) with whom you would work appear compatible with your personality? Y N
  - Does the work schedule (hours/days/weekends/nights, etc.) fit your personal life? Y N
  - Does the geographical location fit your personal life (away from family, a significant other, etc.)? Y N
  - Is the commute acceptable? Y N
- Do you have more "yes" or "no" answers?*