Public Health Path of Distinction
(Medical Students)

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the Path of Distinction?

The Path of Distinction (PoD) is a four-year longitudinal experience for medical students interested in learning more about how to effectively integrate public health into their careers as physicians. It includes one required public health course (PHS 712 Leadership in Medicine and Public Health) along with public health elective courses taken throughout the four years of medical school, a project in a public health setting and a final project summary. Students who meet the requirements of the PoD will be recognized in their Dean’s letter. See: med.wisc.edu/pod for more information.

2. When can I apply to the Path of Distinction?

It is recommended that first year medical students apply to the PoD no later than January 15 of their first year in order to take advantage of the program’s advising and counseling for optional electives and M1/M2 summer projects.

First year medical students interested in public health are recommended to take the elective PHS 712 Leadership in Medicine and Public Health in their first semester. In this course, students will hear from diverse faculty who have integrated public health into their clinical careers. This class is offered only in the fall semester and is required for the PoD.

For students who develop their interest in public health later in their medical school career, an option to apply during their second year of medical school is available.

3. How do I apply to the Path of Distinction?

Students interested in the PoD can apply by submitting their application (available at: http://www.med.wisc.edu/path-of-distinction-in-public-health/main/39740), a current resume and a personal statement (maximum of 500 words) describing their interest and experience in public health. Students may use their final paper for PHS 712 in place of their personal statement. Application materials should be submitted electronically by January 15 to: mdpublichealth@mailplus.wisc.edu.

4. Do I need a minimum GPA to participate in the Path of Distinction?

To ensure that students are able to meet the additional requirements of the PoD, students must successfully complete all courses during their first year, and remain in good standing (according to student services guidelines) throughout medical school. If a student does not successfully complete a medical school course during any semester while they are in the
PoD, they will be put on probation until they successfully complete the course. If they are unable to do so, their acceptance to the PoD program will be withdrawn.

5. I’m interested in other programs within the SMPH. How does the Path of Distinction relate to these programs?

The PoD is designed to lay a framework for initiating or building on a student’s public health interest. To maximize the PoD experience, students complete a project between their M1 and M2 year. This allows students to customize an experience that will develop or supplement their interest in public health. The summer project may align with or complement work they have done or will do with other SMPH programs in WARM, TRIUMPH, Global Health or the MD-MPH Dual Degree Program.

6. What requirements will I need to meet for the Path of Distinction?

Students will complete eight elective credits in public health, participate in at least 160 hours of a public health project and complete a project summary (which includes both a scholarly paper and presentation).

7. When should the coursework be completed?

**Fall of M1 year**: PHS 712 Leadership in Medicine and Public Health should be taken during the fall semester of the first year of medical school. This course exposes students to different paths of integrating public health into their careers. Upon completing this course, students will know if they want to officially move forward with the PoD. Students who do not take the course during their first year will have another opportunity to take the course during the fall of the second year. If the class isn’t completed by the second year, they will be unable to fulfill the requirements of the PoD since this course is required for the PoD and can only be taken during the first two years of medical school.

**Spring of M1 year**: A field course elective is recommended for students during the second semester of their first year, in order to help prepare for their PoD summer project. These courses discuss the cross-cutting public health competencies and the value of the integration of these into the project. A strong field experience begins with solid, well thought out plans which ultimately will impact your future career. Some of these courses are specific to selected programs (e.g., Rural Health elective for students in WARM, Global Health elective for students in the Global Health Certificate).

**M2 & M4 years**: Additional elective courses will be taken throughout the student’s medical school career. To meet the eight-credit requirement, students will want to plan accordingly by taking one to two courses per academic year. Several courses required for WARM, TRIUMPH and global health meet the requirements for PoD approved courses. Online classes are offered during the 4th year that meet PoD requirements and are an ideal option for students located in Madison and throughout the state.
8. What is an appropriate focus for the Path of Distinction project or field experience?

The project can range from a public health field experience (e.g. working in a community agency, health department or international setting) to a healthcare quality improvement project, to a public health research project. Public health research projects focus on:

- Population health within a health care system
- Population approaches within communities
- Engagement of clinical medicine with community resources
- Engagement of clinical medicine with governmental public health agencies
- Policies that affect health and health care for populations
- Primary or secondary prevention within or outside the clinic, drawing on population-based interventions

Previous Path of Distinction students have completed their field experience/project requirement in collaboration with TRIUMPH, the Global Health Certificate or the Shapiro summer research. All of these are ideal ways to develop your specific interests while meeting program requirements.

9. When should I complete the project?

Completing the PoD project between the M1 and M2 year is most ideal and will impact students in the most beneficial way. We have found that students feel that an engaging and well thought out project after the M1 year lays a foundation for growing and developing skills that will make the greatest impact. Further, students are able to better prepare for their work in other SMPH programs including WARM, TRIUMPH, the Global Health Institute and the MD-MPH Dual Degree Program. To ensure you get the most of your PoD experience, plan to complete your project during the summer after your M1 year.

To ensure that your project meets the requirements for the PoD, complete a Field Experience Proposal form. This form will be reviewed by a committee for approval and will ensure that your project will meet the requirement for the PoD.

10. How can I get more information about the PoD?

The PoD staff is happy to provide assistance by answering questions for your specific situation, can provide guidance in regards to finding a mentor or field experience opportunity or can help you determine how public health can fit into your career path. We are located on the second floor of the HSCLC in 2363 HSCLC, which is inside the library. To schedule an appointment, please contact us at mdpublichealth@mailplus.wisc.edu.

11. I’m planning to pursue the MD-MPH Dual Degree Program. Should I still join PoD?
Yes! We encourage all dual degree students to pursue the PoD. This ensures students will be able to make their dual degree a truly longitudinal experience by beginning to develop their public health skills and interests early in their medical education. For students who know early in their medical school career that they want to pursue the dual degree, PRIME Madison may be an ideal option due to the more structured, cohort experience.

12. I already have an MPH, should I still join PoD?

Yes! We have several students who join PoD who already have an MPH. While you will come into the program fully trained in public health, the PoD will allow you to develop skills that will help you merge your MPH with your medical degree in a way that will ensure you use these degrees to the fullest.