

## Program Objectives

The Doctor of Public Health (DrPH) program at the University of Bielefeld is an interdisciplinary professional degree program, which is designed to train students to be academic research leaders, participate in public health policy and work as public health professionals in Germany and worldwide.

One of the main functions of the doctoral program of the Faculty of Health Sciences is to facilitate the preparation of a high quality scientific doctoral thesis. Furthermore, during the program doctoral students expand and deepen their knowledge and competencies in order to be able to independently investigate significant problems and lead projects related to the field of national and global public health.

The program courses focus on the scientific examination of theoretical, methodological and evidence bases of health sciences and on the application of this comprehensive body of knowledge to problems of health care systems. The offered courses are well-structured and accompany the doctoral students on every stage of the preparation of the thesis during three years.

The program has the following educational objectives:

- To expand theoretical knowledge of doctoral students and improve their methodological skills in order to enable students to produce a high quality and original thesis as well as to stimulate development and application of existing and new theoretical and methodological frameworks in health care system
- To enable the students to cooperate and build effective partnerships with academicians and professionals in solving public health problems and to address political, ethical and social problems of health care
- To prepare graduates for work in research positions at universities and research institutions and in senior professional positions in public or private institutions in fields of health policy and health care

*In addition to the information on the website, a detailed information brochure is available for download.*

## Teaching Concept

To promote international comparability and competitiveness, the doctoral degree program, as part of the three-degree structure (bachelor's, master's and doctoral degree) was developed in the course of the Bologna process in the European context of higher education.

At the Faculty of Health Sciences the doctoral degree was introduced in 2003 as the third component of the consecutive study model, which connected the innovative teaching methods and mentoring of doctoral students during the process of the preparation of the thesis.

The practice-oriented DrPH program is a part-time program designed to be completed in three years during which students have to attend several seminars.

Annually students from all fields of health sciences and other relevant disciplines are selected to join the programme to ensure the interdisciplinary nature of public health. An essential criteria for the progress of the doctoral study is an assignment of a faculty mentor (university professor) to each student upon admission. Direct supervision of each student by his mentor(s) is integrated into the curriculum of the DrPH program.

Representatives of various scientific disciplines are involved in the teaching process, in order to bring together the requirements and reality, ambitions and possibilities of the doctoral students. At the same time the students are encouraged to continuously work on their research projects and present their intermediate research results during the regular group meetings. In order to facilitate the communication between the students and university teachers, a speaker is elected for each yearly group.

## **Dissertation**

The dissertation should treat a public health issue that lies in the broad expertise field of the Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Bielefeld. As part of the thesis, the students are expected to examine, analyze, and suggest innovative solutions to a problem in public health theory or practice. The thesis is expected to provide significant contributions from theoretical, methodological and multidisciplinary perspectives.

As a rule, the following components are included in the thesis:

- Overview of the state of scientific knowledge in the selected research field
- Explanation of public health relevance of the selected topic
- Development of appropriate theoretical and conceptual frameworks
- Elaboration of research deficits and research questions
- Presentation of own research question(s) to compensate for the identified research deficits
- Development and discussion of applied research methodology
- Presentation and discussion of the main findings
- Discussion of prospects for further theoretical and methodological work and the practical application of results

The scope of the thesis is 200 to 250 pages.

After the thesis is completed students discuss and defend it in a disputation which lasts up to 90 minutes and is evaluated by the Dissertation Committee.

## **Program Timetable for Completing the Degree**

The DrPH program is a part-time program designed to be completed in three years or six semesters. If the doctoral thesis is completed earlier, the duration of the program can be reduced.

The program starts in the winter semester and covers three academic years.

### **Tasks of the first academic year (first and second semester)**

- In conjunction with faculty mentor finalize the dissertation topic and define its public health relevance
- Begin process of preparation of theoretical and methodological analysis of the selected topic
- Focus on theoretical and methodological concepts and principles of health sciences and interdisciplinary issues
- Attend six required seminars

### **Tasks of the second academic year (third and fourth semester)**

- Focus on the specific theoretical and empirical work in the selected field of research and research question of the dissertation
- Begin process of data collection and conduct first evaluations
- Draft chapters of the thesis
- Attend three required seminars

### **Tasks of the third academic year (fifth and sixth semester)**

- Attend three required seminars
- Continue work on data analysis and write further chapters of the dissertation
- Complete the first drafts of chapters and submit them to the faculty mentor
- Revise and submit the dissertation to the faculty mentor and other members of the Dissertation Committee

## **Organisation of Courses / Schedule**

The curriculum consists of overall twelve 2.5 day seminars. Seminars take place from Thursday to Saturday and have duration of 20 hours each. Students are obliged to attend a minimum nine of them in three years and submit nine qualifying papers thematically relevant to each of the attended seminars.

In the first year six seminars are scheduled, in the second and third year six further seminars take place, with three seminars per year. Some seminars are conducted collectively for the students of the first, second and third year.

## **Study Requirements**

Each DrPH student is required to attend a minimum of nine seminars in three years. All doctoral students obtain certificates of participation necessary to fulfill the program requirements and get permission to submit the dissertation. One of the prerequisites for obtaining the certificate is a written homework (Qualifying Paper, QP) (length 15 to 25 pages). In the first year students are expected to submit 6 qualifying papers (see instructions

below). In the second year students submit the first drafts and in the third year the final drafts of the dissertation chapters in place of QPs.

The 1<sup>st</sup> QP is the exposé, which doctoral students submit for the admission to the DrPH program. It describes the proposed area of study, research question and research design as well as presents the background and public health relevance. This qualifying paper should be presented and discussed by each student during the first seminar.

The following qualifying papers support and create a basis for future dissertation chapters:

- The 2<sup>nd</sup> QP should highlight the public health relevance of the selected research topic and present the background information from the health sciences perspective
- The 3<sup>rd</sup> QP should specify the main research question and additional questions which will be answered in the dissertation
- The 4<sup>th</sup> QP has to critically analyze and discuss the most important knowledge and findings relevant to the research topic
- The 5<sup>th</sup> QP continues the analysis of existing knowledge and refers to the main research question in the light of the present findings. It also focuses on theoretical and conceptual considerations
- The 6<sup>th</sup> QP should prepare the basis for the future empirical chapter of the dissertation and focuses on the selected methodology, data collection and data analysis

Each QP is to be submitted two weeks prior to the beginning of the seminar. Students upload their papers in the intranet ("Blackboard") via their personal account, so that all participants can read and review papers of each other. In addition, each student should once present and discuss her/his own qualifying paper and once the qualifying paper of another participant.

In the third year, students are expected to complete the dissertation. Once the dissertation is completed, students may apply for admission to the disputation.

## **Career Opportunities**

Doctoral studies provide the qualification which is recognized worldwide in academic circles and in business, in industry and by public authorities.

A survey of doctoral students who successfully completed the program at the School of Public Health in Bielefeld showed that the majority of the graduates occupy management and leadership positions in academic or health policy institutions and in other health-related settings. The doctoral degree is important to pursue careers in many professional positions and not just in the academic field of science and research.

Upon completing the DrPH program, the majority of graduates is ready to assume leadership roles in government agencies, ministries and public institutions, research institutes and agencies as well as in health care facilities such as public and private hospitals.

Other doctoral students seek teaching and research positions in universities, colleges and training academies and pursue careers as university teachers or professors. In this role they need the skills to develop new study programs and be able to plan and perform research projects, publish the results and disseminate them to the professional community. The DrPH program provides a comprehensive body of knowledge and training in many of these fields and promotes young scientific careers in the health sciences.

## **Admission**

The minimum requirements for admission into the DrPH program include a diploma or master's degree in health sciences or public health (e.g. Master of Public Health/MPH, Master of Science in Epidemiology/MSE). Graduates from other health-related fields who have completed at least 300 credit points according to the European education system are also admissible.

Applicants from outside the field of public health are admissible if they can demonstrate at least three years of professional experience in a health-related area.

Applicants can be admitted to the program if they fulfil all requirements. The application includes:

- A 15- to 20-page long exposé of the proposed dissertation discussed with and approved by one of the professors of the Faculty of Health Sciences
- The written confirmation from a professor to supervise the dissertation
- Curriculum vitae
- Certified copies of certificates

The professors of the Faculty of Health Sciences who can act as DrPH mentors are listed under "Contact". The final decision on the admission to the program is made by the DrPH doctoral committee.

The exposé of the dissertation should contain the following parts:

1. Problem background / Public health relevance
2. Research questions and objectives
3. State-of-the-art
4. Methodology of research
5. Expected results / Application of the results
6. Work plan and timetable
7. Preliminary table of contents

## **Application**

The preparation of the application to the DrPH program, namely personal contact to one of the faculty mentors and choice of the dissertation topic, should be completed till June 30 each year.

The full application documents should be submitted by 15<sup>th</sup> of July to the following address:

Dean / DrPh Program  
Faculty of Health Sciences  
University of Bielefeld  
PO Box 10 01 31  
33501 Bielefeld  
Germany  
Phone +49(0)521)106-4378 or 4455

The application package includes the following documents:

1. The exposé of the dissertation.
2. The declaration of a professor of the Faculty of Health Sciences to act as the student's mentor upon her/his admission to the program.
3. Certified copies of the certificates which meet the admission requirements.
4. Detailed CV describing recent scientific activities.

The decision on the admission is made by the DrPH doctoral committee by the end of September of each year. The enrolment should be completed prior to the beginning of the winter semester.

## **Alumni**

The degree of Doctor of Public Health was awarded to approximately 150 graduates of the Faculty. Of them, a lot of graduates have successfully become university professors. Most of the graduates have gained their doctoral degree without being directly enrolled in the doctoral program (since 2003 this form of doctorate is no longer possible).

A list of representative graduates and their dissertation topics is available on homepage of Dr PH.

## **Contact**

### **Coordination**

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### **Head of DrPH doctoral committee**

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**Contact the following persons to discuss the dissertation topic:**

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