

September 8, 2021

To: President and Fellows of Harvard College

From: Michelle Williams, Dean of the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health
Jane Kim, Academic Dean
Katie Hope, Executive Dean
Erin Driver-Linn, Dean for Education
Nancy Turnbull, Senior Associate Dean for Educational Programs
Murray Mittleman, Professor of Epidemiology and Chair of the MPH Steering Committee

Cc: Alan Garber, Provost
Bharat Anand, Vice Provost for Advances in Learning

Re: **Extension to the Request to Waive the Residency Requirement for the MPH Generalist degree for AY2022-23**

We write to request an extension to the waiver of the residency requirement for the Master of Public Health (MPH) Generalist degree granted in March 2021 by the Corporation, as was outlined in the attached memo.

By opening up the option of the online MPH Generalist degree last Spring we successfully managed to address the concerns and needs of a small cohort of our accepted MPH-45 students. They were quite grateful (e.g., “I could not have fulfilled my dream of an MPH from Harvard without this option”) and are now engaged in the start of their program. Faculty leading the program and offering instruction have been singularly impressed by the quality and diversity of this cohort of 24 students – from 15 countries and a wealth of backgrounds. One thing we have already learned is that these learners significantly benefit from the program being part-time, given that most of them continue to work in a range of public health jobs, which also enhances the opportunities for the students to learn from one another. The [curriculum](#) we have put together is by necessity limited in choice but includes, in addition to the standard MPH core courses, courses of timely interest that we believe will eventually benefit other students, such as those in the hybrid MPH in Epidemiology program (e.g., *Emergency Preparedness, Disaster Management, and Public Health* and *Using Storytelling to Mobilize Collective Action in Public Health*). We are working closely with the MPH-EPI program to identify new electives of interest to both programs (e.g., *Implementation Science*).

Another year of development will significantly enhance our ability to understand how the program is working, learn more about the distinctiveness of potential students interested in a Generalist degree, and refine the curriculum. We respectfully request that the Corporation vote as follows.

Voted, on the recommendation of the Provost and the Vice Provost for Advances in Learning, to approve a request by the Harvard Chan School of Public Health to waive the standard one-year minimum residency requirement with regard to the Generalist online/low-residency Master of Public Health degree program to be offered in academic year 2022-2023. This constitutes an exception to the standard one-year minimum residency requirement for degree programs stated in the University’s Residency Guidelines, in view of the continuing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

March 16, 2021

To: President and Fellows of Harvard College

From: Michelle Williams, Dean of the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health
Jane Kim, Academic Dean
Katie Hope, Executive Dean
Erin Driver-Linn, Dean for Education
Nancy Turnbull, Senior Associate Dean of Educational Programs
Murray Mittleman, Professor of Epidemiology and Faculty Director of the MPH

Cc: Alan Garber, Provost
Bharat Anand, Vice Provost for Advances in Learning

Re: **Requested Waiver of Residency Requirement for an MPH Generalist degree for AY2021-22**

Our planning for Fall 2021 has evolved rapidly as we continue to monitor the progression of the pandemic, vaccine rollout, and related health and safety requirements. At this point in time, we believe it could be of considerable benefit to have the option of offering an online/low-residency degree program for the Master of Public Health (MPH), our largest degree program. We request your consideration during the upcoming Corporation meeting on March 22nd.

We would like to move forward with planning an online/low-residency generalist MPH that would be offered as an option to:

- (a) Students who have been admitted to our nine-month MPH45 program for Fall 2021 and who have hardships of one kind or another, making a residency requirement a significant impediment to enrollment, and
- (b) MPH students who have been unable to graduate this year because of the need to go part-time or to take a leave of absence.

Our current MPH45 is designed as a 9-month, 45-credit program. The Generalist MPH program would also be 45 credits, and full-time students would complete the program in 9 months. Students could, however, enroll in the online Generalist MPH on a full-time or on a part-time basis. We have seen in this past year, and actually increasingly over the past few years, more requests of MPH45 students to move from full to part-time enrollment. For students in the proposed Generalist MPH program who choose part-time, we would guarantee that they could complete the 45 credits within the school's standard time to degree schedule through online courses offered in subsequent academic years (e.g., AY23).

Our current plans are to be predominantly in-person for our degree programs in Fall 2021. However, we believe that there could continue to be disruptions from COVID throughout the academic year. Having one online degree-program option would help us to reach our enrollment targets, be responsive to the needs of our public health learner population, some of whom may continue to find it difficult to come to Boston and/or need to be part-time, and may help mitigate the potential impact on enrollment of international students who are unable to receive visas in time to be here in September.

The pandemic has had a significant effect on our students – as it has across the world – but being a public health student in a public health crisis has had particular kinds of impact. Many of our students have experienced an increase or qualitative difference in their clinical responsibilities or have found themselves pulled in new directions (e.g., from contract tracing to new systems for tracking virus progression). Many of them have also reported being completely exhausted by this year.

In addition, approximately 30% of our MPH45 students are from countries other than the U.S. and Canada, and we anticipate that some of them may be unable to obtain visas or have clinical, policy and/or family responsibilities during the pandemic that will make it impossible for them to travel to Boston in the fall.

We have already had deferral requests from a number of admitted students, including students who were granted a deferral last year but are still unable to attend in-person this coming year because of the pandemic. Harvard Chan had a very strict deferral policy for AY 20-21, and we granted deferrals to ~80 students, 50 of whom were in the MPH45 program. This represented approximately 20% of the incoming MPH45 cohort.

It is hard to estimate the number of admitted students who might be affected for the coming year, but we anticipate it could be about the same size. Therefore, our best guess is between 50 and 100 students would choose the Generalist option, some of them part-time and some of them full-time. If the Generalist option is approved, we would consider recruiting new applicants for AY22, but if we were to do so we would approach it strategically and in a constrained way to limit the size of the cohort.

Further, we believe – beyond just helping to increase enrollment flexibility because of the pandemic -- that there could be additional benefits to the School in developing this program. In the short term, for this next year, having the option of a 9-month, online/low-residency generalist MPH would be of broader benefit in that it could:

- Reduce the cohort size of our largest program, making it safer and logistically easier to bring students and other people into the building;
- Concentrate our limited resources in continuing to develop high-quality online core content for our MPH program, which we plan to do anyway. We have for several years been shifting core MPH didactic content online to help to optimize in-person learning with more interactive pedagogy, and to help us to meet the heavy accreditation requirements for such a short degree (12 foundational concepts plus 22 MPH competencies need to be met in a 9-month program); and
- Continue the momentum we have currently because of the increased interest in and skills for online teaching in our faculty.

In the long-term, we believe that we would continue to learn from this year's experience toward offering a part-time generalist MPH during the regular admissions cycle:

- Pre-pandemic we had been thinking about the value of an online generalist MPH degree. We have wanted to build on the strength of our MPH-Epi hybrid program (to which we receive applications from applicants who want this format but are more well suited to a broader concentration than epidemiology). We believe this would allow us to reach a highly qualified learner population that we do not now reach because many physicians and others cannot take a year off from their work; and
- Enhance our competitive position relative to peer schools and programs of public health such as Johns Hopkins which already offer fully online or low-residence generalist MPH programs.

For this year, we would leave a path open for some in-person component late in the spring for those students who are able to meet in-person for a week in May.

In the two tables below we compare our proposed curriculum for the Generalist MPH with the curriculum for the MPH45 and outline proposed elements of our timing and planning.

Curriculum overview of the MPH45 compared to the proposed Generalist MPH Program
(both are nine-month programs)

MPH45	Credits	Proposed Generalist MPH	Credits
Biostatistics and Epidemiology	7.5	Biostatistics and Epidemiology	7.5
Other Core Courses Foundations in Public Health Qualitative Methods Health Systems Leadership and Communication Social & Structural Determinants of Health Health Policy and Politics	6.25	Other Core Courses Foundations in Public Health Qualitative Methods Health Systems Leadership and Communication Social & Structural Determinants of Health Health Policy and Politics	6.25
Applied Practice Experience	2.5	Applied Practice Experience	2.5
Field of study requirements	15	Other required courses (this year) Economics (2.5) Innovation in Public Health (2.5) Public Health Ethics (2.5) Health and Global Environment ((2.5) Decision Analysis (2.5) Communicating Public Health Science and Information (2.5) Dissemination & Implementation Science (2.5) Public Health Methods (2.5) Behavior Change/Behavioral Economics (2.5) Leadership and Leading Change in PH (2.5) Improvement Science (2.5) Negotiation (1.25)	28.75
Electives	13.75		
Total Credits	45	Total Credits	45

Notes about expected format and teaching faculty:

- We anticipate that the MPH core courses—biostatistics, epidemiology, and the MPH core courses—will blend the on-campus MPH45 and Generalist MPH students, with both groups in a primarily asynchronous format and opportunities for synchronous engagement. The other required Generalist MPH courses will be delivered asynchronously, with the opportunity for regular synchronous office hours and other sessions with course instructors and TFs, scheduled based on the time zones of the participating students.
- The practice-based course would have the same basic structure and requirements as for the MPH45 program. We were able to pivot the applied practice experience course to online

last spring and have refined and learned from that experience last fall and again this spring. We would build on this experience for the Generalist practicum course.

- Should the Generalist MPH be approved, the School is committed to resourcing it for success. Many of our faculty have been teaching online successfully for years and many more found they enjoyed it more than expected over this past year, and with course evaluation ratings on par or greater than for traditional courses. We have consulted with most of the faculty who expect would teach in these courses and there is interest. These courses would need additional support, and the School is committed to providing that. We have also identified a faculty member who has indicated interest in being the faculty director for the program.

Proposed timing and elements of planning

Currently	Our current target MPH45 enrollment for AY 21-22 is 230 new students. Of this MPH45 population, we estimate that approximately one-third are from outside the U.S., and could potentially be interested in an online MPH, and some smaller number might have clinical or other responsibilities during the pandemic that could make coming to Boston difficult. All of these students take their required core courses in the fall which is a critical space consideration. With so many admitted students being from outside the U.S., not reaching our target enrollments is a concern.
March 22	Corporation decision about our requested waiver of the residency requirement.
April 1	Announcement of fall plans to be as much in-person as possible and with residency requirement. Include the option to apply instead into online 9-month generalist MPH to be offered for up to 100 students. Priority given to front-line workers, international students who are unlikely to receive visas, and those whose care-giving situation has been significantly impacted by COVID. Tuition is the same as the current MPH45. Can be taken part-time. Applying would also be an option for eligible students from this past year who had to shift to part-time or take a leave of absence.
April 15	Current deadline for admitted students to accept. We would ask that admitted students use this same deadline to request admittance into online generalist MPH.
May 1	Notification of acceptance into online generalist MPH option.
December 15	Deadline for those enrolled in the generalist MPH to indicate whether they would like to participate in a one-week, in-person component in May

Thank you for your consideration of this request. We are happy to respond to any questions you may have.