

University of Houston System  
 Summary of New Academic Programs  
 Academic, Research and Student Success Committee  
 Thursday, August 21, 2025

Component	Program	Proposed Implementation Date	Purpose	Comments
UHCL	Bachelor of Science in Public Health	Spring 2026	The University of Houston-Clear Lake seeks approval to launch a 120-credit, four-year Bachelor of Science in Public Health program. The curriculum includes core subjects like health policy, epidemiology, and biostatistics, with students choosing two specialized focus areas. The degree prepares graduates for various public health careers, addressing a growing job market projected by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Major employers include the CDC, NIH, hospitals, and nonprofits. This would be the only BS in Public Health in the Houston-Galveston area, with few similar programs in Texas. The program anticipates becoming revenue-generating by its third year.	In-Person/Hybrid

**Executive Summary for Bachelor of Science in Public Health**  
**University of Houston Clear Lake**

1. Congruence with System Goals and University Mission

The proposed BS in Public Health promotes the UH System Goals of National Competitiveness, Student Success, and Community Advancement. Our program will not only demonstrate that the University of Houston-Clear Lake is nationally competitive in the field of undergraduate public health education, but it will also strengthen Houston and Harris County by adding our graduates to a well-trained and strong public health workforce to improve our region's health.

UHCL's mission includes providing a high-quality educational experience to a diverse student body, where students are trained and encouraged to think critically and are prepared to make meaningful contributions to their communities. At its core, the field of public health is focused on improving the health and well-being of the community, through evidence-based practices that positively impact population-level outcomes. Our graduates will become leaders in the health sector with robust training in the principles and skills of public health. The Core Values of the UHCL College of Human Sciences and Humanities are integrity, innovation, interdisciplinarity, and community. Aligned with these values, the proposed program will adhere to established, grounded standards by seeking accreditation and continuous evaluation to ensure relevance and success, generate new knowledge and encourage students to discover innovative solutions to problems, promote interdisciplinary approaches and collaboration in all areas of the curriculum, and will be community-focused at its core.

Included in the strategic plan of the College is the idea of "destination programs", in which students pursue admission to a program because of its quality and significance rather than simply proximity or convenience. Our proposed program is aligned with the System-level Success Indicator of preparing graduates who will change the world. There is no better time than this point in history – in which the world's focus is on the public's health – to move forward in educating and training graduates who will be prepared to positively impact the public health and healthcare systems at the local, national, and international levels.

2. Program Description

The Bachelor of Science (BS) in public health is a 4-year undergraduate degree that can lead to a broad array of career opportunities and also positions students for further study in graduate or clinical school settings. Students admitted to the BS in Public Health degree at UHCL will complete courses in the core areas of public health – health systems and policy, epidemiology, environmental health, health promotion and behavioral science, and biostatistics – and will choose two cognates to build breadth to their knowledge and skills.

Relevant public health-related coursework in various colleges and departments across UHCL are integrated into the curriculum, in an effort to broaden students' understanding of factors that impact population health, the health care system, and individual-level outcomes. The integration of specialty ("cognate") courses into the degree plan is intended to broaden a student's understanding of their major coursework by encouraging them to apply public health concepts in related fields, and to allow them to develop a unique knowledge base and skill set, which will be an asset upon graduation and entry into the job market. The proposed program would allow

students to choose two cognates from the following: (1) Public Health Methods & Statistics, (2) Healthcare Management & Policy, (3) Environmental & Occupational Health, (4) Society, Behavior, and Health, and (5) Pre-Clinical Health Professions. The last cognate would enable students who are on a pre-clinical track for further graduate study to seamlessly complete their prerequisites along with their degree requirements.

The curriculum will be tailored to address the skills and knowledge demanded by the job market. The Council on Linkages Between Academia and Public Health Practice identifies eight domains of public health skills, which will form the backbone of the core curriculum: analytical/assessment, policy development/program planning, communication, cultural competency, community dimensions of practice, public health sciences, financial planning and management, and leadership and systems thinking skills. In addition, across the core curriculum, students will be trained and evaluated on the ten domains required of public health professionals, as outlined by the National Board of Public Health Examiners: evidence-based approaches to public health, communication, leadership, law and ethics, public health biology and human disease risk, collaboration and partnership, program planning and evaluation, program management, policy in public health, and health equity and social justice.

Keeping with standard bachelor's degree requirements, the BS in Public Health will require a total of 120 credit hours. Of these, 42 credit hours are required as part of the UHCL General Education Core Curriculum, 3 credit hours are required by the College of Human Sciences and Humanities, and 30 credit hours will be required public health core courses. Students will then take 12 hours in each of two public-health-focused cognates (24 hours total) and will finish the degree requirements with up to 21 hours of electives.

### 3. Student and Job Market Demand

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment of healthcare-related occupations is projected to grow much faster than the average for all occupations from 2023 to 2033. Health care and public health are inherently connected, and the most efficient models of health care delivery involve the interconnection between medical care and public health. In fact, an increasing number of professionals trained in public health principles are now finding jobs in diverse medical and business fields. Public health careers are often misunderstood because the field can be difficult to define. At one level, public health involves medical care provided within a community and outside a hospital setting. In a different context, public health can have global repercussions and refer to efforts to prevent epidemics and improve the health of entire nations.

As a result of the myriad of services provided by public health workers, an incredibly diverse number of occupations can be held by those educated in the field. Professionals work in a wide range of settings including in infectious disease control; addressing health problems of vulnerable populations; chronic disease management; health monitoring and surveillance; health education; environmental/occupational health and safety; policymaking; and emergency preparedness. Students who complete this degree will be prepared to work as epidemiologists, health educators, community health workers, health care administrators, policy and programmatic developers, and public health analysts, among others. Top employers in public health include the CDC, state and local public health departments, the National Institutes of Health (NIH), academic and research-affiliated organizations, hospitals and medical facilities, managed care organizations, the corporate sector, and nonprofits.

UHCL currently offers a public health minor, housed within the undergraduate Kinesiology program. It is anticipated that more students will enroll once it is a distinct degree with specific, public health course requirements. In addition to students already enrolled in the minor, the following student groups are potential degree candidates:

- Currently enrolled and prospective students who are interested in health-related careers but prefer not to pursue preparation in a specific health profession, or who are not yet aware of the range of health careers open to them and want to explore career options.
- Currently enrolled and prospective students who must complete the pre-requisites for programs such as pre-clinical degrees (medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, physical therapy, occupational therapy, physician assistant) and who desire the option of a liberal arts education focused on the interdisciplinary aspects of health.
- Prospective students who hold an Associate’s degree or certificate, such as medical assistants, radiologic technologists and medical laboratory technicians who want to earn a Baccalaureate degree for advancement at their present place of employment.
- Prospective students who are currently employed in the field of public health – or a related sector – who wish to advance their education and skill set for career progression.
- Prospective students who hold non-health related degrees and want to pursue the field of public health.

#### 4. Program Duplication

The proposed BS in Public Health degree at UHCL would be considered a “standalone baccalaureate program” (SBP) in the eyes of the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH), the accrediting body of education in public health. There are currently only 29 accredited SBPs in the country, with programs ranging in focus and degree requirements Throughout Texas, there are only three, CEPH-accredited, baccalaureate-level degrees: Baylor University and Texas A&M Health Science Center offer a BS in Public Health, and the University of the Incarnate Word offers a BS in Community Health Education.

**In the Houston-Galveston metropolitan area, there are no BS in Public Health degrees.** The following table lists related degrees that may cover similar topic areas; however, none are specific degrees designed around the core public health competencies, and none operate within a public health (51.21XX) CIP code. The UHCL proposed degree requirements are structured to prepare students for the public health workforce demand in the Texas Gulf Coast Region, the state of Texas, and around the world.

<b>Degree Title &amp; Description</b>	<b>Institution</b>	<b>CIP Code</b>
BS in Health - Option to choose from 3 tracks, one of which is public health	University of Houston	51.0001
BS in Health & Behavioral Science - Option to choose from 3 tracks, none of which are public health	University of Houston Downtown	51.2212
BA in Health Sciences	Rice University	51.0001
BS in Health, Kinesiology, and Sport Studies - Option to choose from several tracks, one of which is health studies	Texas Southern University	31.0501

## 5. Faculty Resources

The BS in Public Health degree at UHCL would be housed in the Department of Health, Human, and Biomedical Sciences within the College of Human Sciences & Humanities. The proposed program director, Dr. Isabelle Kusters, holds a PhD in public health and has postdoctoral training in Health Professions Education, Evaluation, and Research. Currently, she teaches in the Kinesiology (KINE) BS public health minor and Exercise & Health Sciences (EXHS) MS programs. It is anticipated that, with the approval of this degree program, Dr. Kusters will shift the majority of her time to the Public Health BS Program but will remain part of the EXHS MS program faculty for courses in those degrees. The courses Dr. Kusters has been teaching will be covered by other full-time faculty and adjuncts, which will allow her to shift 80% of her FTE to the BS in Public Health.

Within the cognate selections available to students, faculty are leaders in teaching and research in their respective fields related to public health. The degree's cognate courses build upon courses offered by current UHCL faculty, with core-specific courses already approved by the college's curriculum committee. For these new additions, adjunct faculty holding Master's- or Doctoral-level degrees will be used for the first semesters until program growth warrants the addition of faculty line(s) within the first 2 years of the program, depending on growth.

The program would be housed within the current office and classroom spaces of the UHCL campus, including the Student Services & Classroom Building and the Bayou Building.

## 6. State or National Need

Locally, Harris County is the most populous county in Texas and the third largest in the United States, with over 4.7 million residents. While our area prospers from the oil & gas, technology, trade, and health care industries, the County sees huge disparities in the ability of its residents to acquire basic health insurance coverage: the county has one of the nation's largest un- and under-insured populations. In 2018, 27% of Houston-area residents over age 18 were uninsured. These disparities in coverage, and therefore access to care, are even more pronounced in minority and underserved populations, with the Hispanic population most likely to be uninsured (56%). Furthermore, the geographic distribution of uninsured adults within Harris County varies greatly, from 7% to 56%. This lack of access to care results in detrimental health outcomes: Houstonians have high rates of obesity, high blood pressure, and diabetes, with many residents reporting multiple comorbidities.

In Texas, data from the Texas Workforce Commission indicate high numbers of job openings in the multitude of career paths available to those with an undergraduate degree in public health. For example, in 2024, employment rates for public health jobs (e.g., epidemiologist, community health worker, environmental scientist, medical and health services manager, occupational health specialist) were expected to increase by 20-40%. This number is expected to rise, given the recent focus on public health with the COVID-19 pandemic and related healthcare access issues and disparities in health outcomes.

