Work in Global Health During College
A guide from UW-Madison’s Certificate in Global Health
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Table of contents
(numbers refer to sections, not pages)

1. Introduction: why and how
2. What's the difference between a volunteer position and an internship?
3. Finding internships in general
4. Internships and volunteer experiences in and around Madison
5. Internships and volunteer experiences outside Madison and Wisconsin
6. Student organizations at UW-Madison
7. Research
8. Can I count my volunteer work, internship, or research as my field experience for the Certificate in Global Health?

1) Introduction: why and how

UW-Madison is great, but let's face it: a lot of your classes are large. It's possible to get through school without having your instructors know you and without doing much besides reading, writing, and taking exams. You can graduate without having actually done the kinds of work you've read about and without talking outside a classroom with anyone else who has. The Certificate in Global Health has its own field courses and can help connect you with field courses run by outside groups, but most of those are just a few weeks long.

Fortunately, there are a lot of great opportunities outside of class that you can pursue to get more real-world experience. Opportunities include research as either a volunteer, a paid employee, or an independent study student; volunteer experiences; internships; work with student organizations; and other positions of all kinds. If you don't connect with at least one of these experiences for some or all of the time you are at UW-Madison, you've missed a big part of the potential value of being at a large university in a vibrant mid-sized city. There are also, of course, life-altering things you can do outside Madison during summers, winter, and spring breaks (as well as, perhaps, a semester spent off campus).

We admit that you do really have to pursue these opportunities. It takes real, disciplined work to polish up a resume and keep it up-to-date, secure recommendations, do research on potential employers/mentors and customize a cover letter and in-person presentation for each one, knock on a lot of doors (both in person and electronically), and swallow rejections. There is help available around campus for at least some parts of this process -- please talk to a Certificate advisor for some suggestions if you need them.

You should NOT feel that you need to do a dozen different things in order to be prepared for graduate school or future employment -- some undergraduate students have so many choices that they seem to forget how to make choices and take on too many things, ending up stressed and
unhappy. If you do a dozen things, there are at least 6 of them you can't do well. Rather than spreading yourself around between a lot of short-term or limited-time experiences, most employers and graduate school admissions committees would like you to have extensive experience doing one or two things at which you gained real skills, had real responsibilities, and about which you can speak articulately. You typically have to stay in almost any job or volunteer position for at least six months before you are trusted and are given real responsibility. That said, while you are trying to find out what those one or two things will be, there's no shame in trying out a number of things for shorter periods.

Keep in mind (as discussed in our Work in global health after college guide) that global health involves much more than the traditional health care fields you might at first think of. Medicine plays a critical role in global health, and Madison offers a lot of great opportunities to do medical research, shadow varied medical practitioners, and volunteer in hospitals. But what if you don't want to do work in clinical settings? What if you're interested in doing research to create drought-tolerant varieties of tomatoes, or want to intern with a local non-profit to help refugees connect with social services? What if you want to work with researchers, community groups, and government officials who are trying to figure out how to address phosphorous pollution of local lakes? What if you want to volunteer at a shelter for battered women or the homeless? Those are just a few of the options you might consider that have connections to later careers in global health. Even if you are interested in a clinical career, working now in non-clinical settings can help you develop integrity, communications skills, cultural awareness, and other professional competencies that will make you a better clinician later.

The rest of this guide contains some thoughts about groups, programs, and institutions in Madison and beyond that you may want to approach about volunteer work, an internship, or perhaps even a job. We have avoided listing specific names in some sections not out of laziness, but because such a listing is inevitably incomplete and out-of-date and encourages you to contact organizations that may not have the desire or capacity to take you on.

2) What's the difference between a volunteer position and an internship?

Internships are like short-term jobs where education is a recognized element of the job. They can be paid or unpaid. According to the guidelines used by UW's International Internship Program, or IIP, "There must [also] be an internship supervisor and specific learning goals in addition to a description of the work to be carried out." Internships usually involve substantial time commitments -- for IIP, and for a domestic internship program through Inter L&S, that means least 96 hours of work over at least four weeks (though you can spread that 96 hours over a whole 15-week semester if desired, working just 6-8 hours a week). Volunteer positions usually involve less time commitment, are based around responsibilities (answering a phone, handing out materials, etc.) that do not require much training, and may not involve much supervision. In some organizations, work as a volunteer can lead to internship opportunities later on.

In terms of preparing you for graduate school and/or employment after college, internships can be better than volunteer positions because interning more often results in the creation of a document, program, or other "product" that you can show to graduate schools and employers.
However, volunteering can be a great way to decide with minimal commitment of time and energy whether you have any interest in the mission of a particular organization. As discussed later in this guide, internships can be done for credit and can potentially be used to complete the field experience requirement for the Certificate in Global Health.

3) Finding internships in general  

Broadly speaking, there are two kinds of internships:

A. Informal, independently arranged internships -- Many organizations are willing and even eager to have interns but don't have the time and resources to advertise for them, interview them, train them, oversee them, etc. Other organizations may not be so eager but are willing to discuss the idea with you if you are persistent enough and convincing enough in describing your qualifications and potential for helping them. Finding this sort of internship involves creating it from scratch yourself in partnership with one or more staff members of the organization. Figuring out who those people are and how to convince them to take you on as an intern can be hard, as can be finding the organization to begin with (more comments on that in sections below). Internships that you set up this way may end up being as rigorous and interesting as the formal kind (or even more so, since organizations that are too small to have a formal internship program often have a huge amount of varied work to do and few people to do it with), but you have to make it happen yourself by finding the organization and persuading them to take you as an intern.

There are no set deadlines, application requirements, start/end dates, etc. for this kind of internship, though if you set up an internship like this you should definitely make sure you have an identified supervisor who will meet with you regularly, agreed start/end dates, goals for work, etc. Sometimes this kind of internship can be arranged very quickly and at any time of year, and sometimes the whole process takes months.

B. Formal, publicly announced internships -- Run by universities, other nonprofit groups, corporations, and some government agencies, these are internships that are posted on one or more web sites, advertised by e-mail, social media, etc., and have both a set deadline and clear application instructions ("Write an essay describing your interest in..."). Some may require transcripts and one or more letters of recommendation. The application deadlines are usually not flexible, so you have to plan well in advance to have a chance of getting this kind of internship.

The next two sections refer to these two types of internships. Before you read those sections, it's worth taking some time to answer a few questions about a hypothetical internship position:

A. What issue(s) do you want to learn more about? HIV/AIDS? Lead poisoning? Obesity and physical activity? School gardening? Breastfeeding? Environmental health? Health needs of immigrants? Vaccine development? Something else? If you don't know "official" terms for what you want to do (or don't have a particular topic in mind at all), then try talking with a certificate advisor or looking through a public health textbook (or
the syllabi from your certificate classes). It's fine to be interested in more than one topic – that will give you more internship options!

B. **What kind(s) of work do you want to do during your internship?** Do you want to collect data? Do you want to create educational or promotional materials? Do you want to learn about development (that is, raising money)? Do you want to organize a conference? Do you not care exactly what you do as long as you have opportunities to do some networking and meet and observe professional people doing what they do to address issue X? You may not have much choice about what you do during an internship, but you certainly can and should ask about that when you are exploring a possible internship.

C. **Can you afford to take an unpaid internship?** In global health, most internships are unpaid. Can you afford to work a fair bit at your internship without making money? If the answer is "no," then you may want to either a) pass on the internship or b) fit an internship in during a fall or spring semester when you are taking classes and (hopefully) not needing to make a lot of money.

D. **Can you relocate to do the internship?** If you can't leave Madison (or your home town) to do an internship, then that limits your search to organizations to which you can drive, bike, walk, or take public transit. If you can afford to go somewhere else, great!

4) **Internships and volunteer experiences in around Madison**

See sections two and three for discussions of the terms “volunteer,” “informal internship,” and “formal internship.”

**Informal internships and volunteering**


This state agency has many branches and subunits, some (like the Division of Public Health) very involved with public and global health issues and some less so. Explore their web site and take time to look at all of the topics for which they are responsible. In some cases, there are links to outside groups like non-profits with whom you might work. Not all units in DHS take volunteers or interns, and we have not so far been able to identify a central starting point for students interested in working at DHS. For now, we recommend finding the unit(s) of interest to you on the DHS web page and reading their materials carefully to see if each accepts interns or volunteers -- if they don't say anything about it, then we encourage you to go ahead and (Politely! Professionally!) contact any people listed as program administrators. One unit that definitely does take interns from time to time is the [Wisconsin Refugee Health Program](http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/).

B. **Madison Hospitals and Clinics** -- As you may know, Madison has several excellent hospitals, each of which has at least some programs or units that support public/global health outreach, prevention, etc. The UW Center for Pre-Health Advising maintains a list of these. Most of what you will connect with by finding their relevant web page is volunteering, but you may be able to use the same contacts to get leads toward more in-depth internship-type positions.

C. **Nonprofits, corporations, and other entities** -- Madison is home to many groups that are working on diverse public and global health issues from varied angles. Some are big and have formal opportunities for involvement (see, for example, [Madison School and](http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/)
Community Recreation), but many are smaller and may not have had an intern or volunteer before you persuade them to take you on. Large or small, it's impossible to list them all here, though UW's Center for Pre-Health advising lists some key ones here. They also list Volunteeryourtime.org, which is a searchable database of volunteer opportunities within Dane County. Badger Volunteers, a program run by UW's Morgridge Center for Public Service, partners with a growing number of public health-related organizations and can be an excellent way to start getting engaged. Badger Volunteers provides transportation and other kinds of support to help you fit volunteering into your life.

D. Searching via the news -- Searching the web with good terms can be helpful for finding small organizations. Good search terms to include along with your key global health topic are "nonprofit" and either "Madison" or "Wisconsin," though you may want to leave location terms out of your search, at least at first -- instead, find out about what nationwide organizations come up in response to your search in general, look at their web pages, and learn about terms those groups use to describe themselves and the work they do.

Especially when you localize your search by adding in "Madison" or "Wisconsin," taking the time to read search results that are blog posts, newspaper articles, or other written pieces (rather than the web sites of organizations) can be well worth it, since such writings often mention groups you might want to work with that are too small to maintain a web presence or whose names don't immediately suggest what they do. For example, one of the results from a Google search with the terms "health disparities Wisconsin" is a page from the Department of Health Services that describes their "What Works: Reducing Health Disparities in Wisconsin" program. Following links on that page leads you to descriptions of some of the organizations that have been funded by the What Works program, all of which sound interesting and public health-related but several of which do not have their own web pages.

Formal internship opportunities

A. Public Health of Madison and Dane County (PHMDC) -- http://www.publichealthmdc.com/opportunities/ -- Like DHS, PHMDC does a lot of varied public and global health work. Exploring their web site is an excellent way to learn about pressing public health issues in Madison as well as community groups that partner with PHMDC to address them. PHMDC takes volunteers and interns, but they want you to contact them at least 2-3 months before your potential start date. Earlier than that can be good – they often fill up their fall slots before the beginning of the summer, for example.

B. Community Health Internship Program (CHIP) -- http://www.ahec.wisc.edu/chip -- Run by the Wisconsin Area Health Education Center (AHEC) System and based in the UW School of Medicine and Public Health, CHIP runs rigorous, well-regarded, and competitive internships in public health (they’re also paid!). Look carefully at their deadlines (typically in Feb. of any given year for the following summer) before applying. Talk to a certificate advisor for application tips.

C. Wisconsin Express -- http://www.ahec.wisc.edu/wisconsin-express -- Like CHIP, above, Wisconsin Express is run by AHEC. Unlike AHEC's CHIP program, in which interns
spend most of their summer working with an AHEC-approved organization, Wisconsin Express is a one-week program in which students in health professions are immersed in one of Wisconsin’s diverse communities learning about health care resources and challenges faced by particular or urban or rural populations. Because of its short duration and emphasis on observation rather than work, it really isn't an internship, but it's more structured than just volunteering.

D. *Marshfield Clinic's Summer Student Research Internship Program* -- [lengthy web link] -- Run by the Marshfield Clinic (a network of hospitals and clinics in northern, central, and western Wisconsin), this 12-week summer program provides students with highly mentored research opportunities in various fields, including epidemiology and general public health.

5) Internships and volunteer experiences outside Madison and Wisconsin

See sections two and three for discussions of the terms “volunteer,” “informal internship,” and “formal internship.”

Informal internships and volunteering

It's impossible to make a directory of quality internship or volunteer hosts that's even vaguely comprehensive, though Tulane University's School of Tropical Medicine and Public Health has made a wonderful effort that way -- see [http://tulane.edu/publichealth/students/career-internships.cfm](http://tulane.edu/publichealth/students/career-internships.cfm)

If you want to be outside Madison but the Tulane list does not include organizations of interest to you, then the tips given in the previous section about web searching may be relevant here, too. Searching for "Human trafficking" and "Europe" (a random example) with Google brings you to some organizations trying to address the issue, as well as news stories that mention additional organizations you can follow up through further searching.

Formal internships

If you’re interested in these, make sure to check both deadlines and eligibility requirements! Most have deadlines in January or February, but do check. Several of these with words in **bold face type** only take underrepresented students. Others may prioritize underrepresented students but accept applications from anyone who meets the other eligibility requirements. Some have GPA limits or other restrictions. Most of these programs run only during the summer, for obvious reasons, but a few offer internships during the fall and spring. These may (may!) be less competitive than summer programs.

A. *The Columbia Summer Public Health Scholars Program* -- [http://www.odap-ps.cumc.columbia.edu/programs/about_sphsp.html](http://www.odap-ps.cumc.columbia.edu/programs/about_sphsp.html) -- "The program includes Public Health course work at Columbia University; hands-on field experience and immersion in a diverse, economically disadvantaged urban environment; seminars and lectures with public health leaders, and mentoring by faculty members, ensuring students exposure to the breadth and importance of public health as a career option."
B. Harvard's Multidisciplinary International Research Training (MIRT) Program -- [http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/mirt/](http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/mirt/) -- Run by Harvard's School of Public Health, "MIRT is a national program designed to encourage underrepresented students to pursue careers in biomedical and behavioral science research careers. The program provides support for undergraduate and graduate students to do research work overseas. MIRT is funded by The National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD) of the National Institutes of Health as part of the Minority Health and Health Disparities International Research Training (MHIRT) Program. The Harvard School of Public Health MIRT Program (formerly the University of Washington MIRT Program) builds on established linkages with academic institutions throughout the world, including in Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, Republic of Georgia, Peru, Mexico, Ecuador, Chile, and Australia. Students spend 8-12 weeks (beginning mid-June) at the foreign research site."

C. University of Alabama's Minority Health International Research Training (MHIRT) Program -- [http://www.soph.uab.edu/mhirt/](http://www.soph.uab.edu/mhirt/) -- "The Department of Epidemiology at the University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Public Health is offering research training opportunities to minority undergraduate, graduate and health professions students who have an interest in the areas of nutrition, tropical infectious diseases, reproductive health and/or sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS or chronic disease."

D. Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health Diversity Summer Internship Program -- [http://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/graduateprograms/sip.cfm](http://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/graduateprograms/sip.cfm) -- "Provides experience in biomedical and/or public health research laboratories to students of diverse backgrounds, including underrepresented minority students, students from economically disadvantaged and underserved backgrounds and students with disabilities that have completed one - two or more years of college."

E. University of Michigan's Future Public Health Leaders (FPHLP) Program -- [http://sitemaker.umich.edu/um-fphlp/home](http://sitemaker.umich.edu/um-fphlp/home) -- "The FPHLP is a 10-week summer program at the University of Michigan School of Public Health (UM-SPH) whose goal is to increase the diversity of the public health workforce. Participants receive leadership training, orientation to the public health disciplines, and real world work experience. The program is designed to foster knowledge of, excitement about, and commitment to the elimination of health inequalities."

F. American Public Health Association Internship/Fellowship -- [http://www.apha.org/about/careers/internships/](http://www.apha.org/about/careers/internships/) -- "Both undergraduate and graduate students are eligible for unpaid APHA internships. The internships at APHA are extremely beneficial to those seeking to acquire practical work experience. Candidates should be working towards a bachelor, graduate, or postgraduate degree, and all majors are welcome." Most of their internships take place in Washington, DC.

G. Collegiate Leaders in Environmental Health -- [http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/cleh/](http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/cleh/) -- "This is a paid 10-week summer environmental internship for undergraduate students who are passionate about the environment, interested in human health, and curious about how they are linked." Run by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

H. Project IMHOTEP Summer Research Internship Program – [http://www.morehouse.edu/centers/psih/grants-imhotep.html](http://www.morehouse.edu/centers/psih/grants-imhotep.html) -- An 11-week training program for juniors, seniors, and recent graduates interested in minority health,
biostatistics, epidemiology, occupational safety and health, or the health sciences. Run by Morehouse College.

I. *Occupational Health Internship Program* -- [http://aoec.org/ohip/](http://aoec.org/ohip/) -- “Summer internship for graduate and undergraduate students interested in occupational health. Students work with unions or social justice organizations and gain hands-on experience with workplace safety and health. Teams of two students are placed with a union or worker organization to work on projects that investigate job-related health and safety problems among workers, often of new immigrant groups, employed in an under-served or a high hazard job.” Paid, offered by the Association of Occupational and Environmental Clinics (AOEC).

J. *US Department of Health and Human Services Public Health Internship Program* -- [http://www.hrsa.gov/about/jobs/internprogram.html](http://www.hrsa.gov/about/jobs/internprogram.html) -- "Public Health Interns will complete a one semester rotation within one of HRSA’s Bureaus or Offices. The public health internships at HRSA is an unfunded practicum experience for graduate and undergraduate students in good standing at schools of public health and public health programs in the United States. The HRSA Public Health internship provides an unparalleled opportunity for professional growth and development as a public health practitioner and will prepare the intern to be an ambassador for the important work of HRSA in his/her professional discipline, work setting, or community. The intern will have frequent contact with HRSA’s public health experts in one of a wide-range of disciplines including (to name just a few): rural health policy, HIV/AIDS, maternal and child health, health systems, and program analysis and evaluation."

K. *USAID Global Health Fellows II Internships and Fellowships* -- [https://www.ghfp.net/](https://www.ghfp.net/) -- The US Agency for International Development (USAID) is one of the biggest players in development efforts worldwide (in health and many other areas). This program, known as GHFP-II, runs paid internships and fellowships. Many of these are only open to graduate students, but some are open to undergrads. Look carefully at eligibility information before applying!

L. *Partners in Health* -- [http://www.pih.org/pages/internship-and-fellowship-programs](http://www.pih.org/pages/internship-and-fellowship-programs) -- "Every year, PIH’s research and advocacy arm, the Institute for Health and Social Justice (IHSJ) hosts a summer internship program for students and professionals early in their careers who are interested in learning about current issues in health and social justice. In addition to working on individual projects, summer interns have a unique opportunity to learn firsthand about PIH and gain practical exposure to the administration of a non-governmental organization through interactions with staff members, movie and book discussions, and social activities. In collaboration with a staff mentor, each intern will complete a project or support a core function of the organization. Projects are based on PIH’s programmatic needs and span all different facets of the organization. Examples of past intern projects range from developing content for PIH’s website and newsletter to researching and writing position papers on key PIH advocacy issues, to working with our Electronic Medical Records team to improve patient data collection. Interns will also be expected to assist with administrative tasks. The internships are based at the PIH offices in Boston. The minimum time commitment is 24 hours (3 workdays) per week, and we ask that you be present for the entire duration of the internship. The internship is unpaid, and we are unable to offer or organize housing or transportation."
6) Student organizations at UW-Madison

UW's Center for Pre-Health Advising typically maintains a list of health-related student organizations that are aimed at future medical professionals. Some are more public/global health-oriented than others, though all of them offer at least some activities related to global health. Through no fault of the Pre-Health folks, that list is usually not 100% complete -- new orgs pop up all the time, and some fade away.

There are other groups on campus (The Millennium Development Goals Awareness Project, TAWI, and The One Acre Fund, for example) not on the Pre-Health list that have health-related goals without the health career angle. A searchable directory of all UW student orgs is available here, though searching is not easy.

If you join an organization that runs trips of any kind to destinations either in or outside the US, be aware that some student orgs are more in tune than others with best practices of international development. Put bluntly, some student orgs may encourage you to do things you shouldn't (things that should only be done by doctors or nurses with credentials valid in the host country, for example). When in doubt, consult a certificate advisor or the faculty or staff sponsor of the student org (there should be at least one!).

7) Research

UW's Center for Pre-Health Advising maintains a nice web page on identifying and getting accepted to research opportunities. Their page points you to very nice, detailed information provided by UW's Institute for Biology Education. We strongly encourage you to look at those resources, but here's our own short summary developed in response to student questions.

It can be hard to set up a research experience, especially if you have no previous research experience, but it's doable and well worth trying. One place to look is the UW Student Job Center at http://jobcenter.wisc.edu/ Some research jobs get posted there, especially in the “Science” category, but there is unfortunately no central clearinghouse where faculty post open research positions. Many are never posted at all and end up being filled by students who made “cold calls” (that is, approached faculty directly) or whom the faculty member met in a class.

The age-old way to get involved in research is to make those cold calls -- knock on a whole bunch of doors of faculty who are doing work you're interested in doing yourself. You used to have to actually knock on their doors, though today you can at least try e-mailing them first. Many faculty are overwhelmed by e-mail, however, so trying to meet them in person during drop-in advising hours or other in-person meeting opportunities can be a good way to go if it's an option. Be prepared for a lot of "no" – again, faculty are overwhelmed such that even the very kindest of them may not have the time and energy to fully consider what you want or to refer you to other people. Be willing to do entry-level, basic work like cleaning glassware, making media, and tending experimental animals. If you do this work conscientiously, you may very well be able to get involved with doing experiments, especially if your coursework has provided you with relevant technical skills (use of appropriate instruments, software, etc.). If you're willing to volunteer rather than be paid, that may also help.
If you can wait until you have even some tiny relationship with a faculty member ("I'm in course X and I was interested in what you said about subject Y when you were a guest speaker last week...") that can help, too. It also really helps if you can inform yourself at least a little bit about what they do -- read the summary on their web page, find one or more recent research papers of theirs and read at least the abstracts of those, etc. If you can say in your e-mail or in a phone conversation "I know you work on X and I am interested in it because ____," rather than just "I want to do research," that's more likely to convince the faculty member that you are serious (you took the time to learn about what they do!).

If you’re not sure where to start looking for people doing research in global health, one place is the list of faculty affiliated with UW’s Global Health Institute (many of whom also teach or are otherwise involved in the Undergraduate Certificate). That list should be available on the web site of the Global Health Institute (as of the writing of this draft, GHI is in between web sites, so no link is available). Even if those faculty are not able to help you out, exploring the research interests of other faculty in their departments or units can also lead you to interesting possibilities.

Sometimes, searching for possible faculty mentors in the UW Experts database is helpful -- the database is here, and you can search with either phrases like "public health" or "global warming" or single words like "HIV" to find people who might be at least starting points for networking, if not actual research mentors with positions open.

You may also want to start by looking at lists of faculty in departments, schools, colleges, programs, and special units that do a lot of work in global health. The most obvious example of this is the Department of Population Health Sciences. A few other obvious examples are the UW Population Health Institute and the Survey of the Health of Wisconsin (SHOW). Which others you check out will depend on what subtopics in global/public health you are interested in. Education? Try looking at faculty in Educational Policy Studies. Social work? Try the School of Social Work. Policy? Try the LaFollette School of Public Policy. Ethics? Try Medical History and Bioethics. Agriculture or nutrition? Try Agronomy or Nutritional Sciences or related departments like Community and Environmental Sociology. You get the idea. In most (though not all) cases you can find not only lists of faculty but also descriptions of their work and/or links to their resumes and publications. We can't emphasize enough that it is important to be able to tell a potential research supervisor specifics of why you are interested in their work and why you think you are a good fit to join them.

8) Can I count my volunteer work, internship, or research project as my field experience for the Certificate in Global Health?

In general, we can't count any volunteer work -- the work is not academic enough, is too short in duration, or has other issues. We also can't count any internships or research projects that were not completed for credit. If you did or may do an internship or research project for credit and are interested in having our program count it as your field experience, please read the program’s field experience guide. That (plus a talk with an advisor, potentially) will help you decide whether or not it’s worth submitting the experience for possible approval.