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—Katherine Deland, J.D., M.P.H. ’01

Taking the M.P.H. to Another Degree

Students Double Up in Concurrent Programs

As a graduate of biochemistry and working as a scientist for a year, Katherine Deland found herself at a crossroads. After getting her undergraduate degree in biochemistry and working as a scientist for a year, she decided that bench work wasn’t for her. Shifting gears, she did an internship with the public defender service in Washington, D.C., and found she loved the law. But as she prepared to enter law school at UCLA, she wasn’t comfortable with the thought of leaving science behind.

In public health, she found the best of both worlds. "As I learned more about it, I saw this great avenue of law, policy and health opening up," she says. "Going to school for both a J.D. and an M.P.H. would be niche training that would put me right where I wanted to be."

At the time, the School of Public Health had no J.D./M.P.H. program, "but was very willing to talk to me about doing it," Deland says. In 1997, she embarked on her pursuit of the two degrees. Four years later, she had them.

As the value of a public health degree becomes more evident to graduate students from a wide variety of disciplines, the number of concurrent degree programs offered by the School in growing (see the accompanying list). "As I learned more about the School of Public Health and the J.D./M.P.H. program, I became more interested in law and the thought of leaving science behind," Deland says. "I ended up doing both J.D. and an M.P.H. but wasricht where I wanted to be."

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of time than if they obtained those degrees separately is very appealing to students who have overlapping interests," says Dr. Gerald Kominski, associate dean for academic programs.

For example, many graduate students in area studies programs have an interest in the health of the populations they're studying and have been attracted to the School, which now offers concurrent M.A./M.P.H. degrees for students in African studies, Asian American studies, Islamic studies and Latin American studies. "It's a nice balance," says Jill Lopez, a student in the M.A./M.P.H. in Latin American Studies program who hopes to use her dual degrees to address reproductive health issues in Latin America.

Adesuwa Ogiamien was an undergraduate at UCLA majoring in sociology when she began working for Dr. Jonathan Fielding, professor of health services at the School of Public Health and director of public health for L.A. County. "I discovered this discipline I had known nothing about," says Ogiamien, who had been planning to go to law school. As she was learning more about public health, she read a *Time* magazine article about the devastation of HIV/AIDS in Africa. After talking with faculty at the School and searching the Internet to learn about jobs available through the World Health Organization and United Nations, she decided to abandon her law school ambitions in favor of concurrent master's degree programs in African studies and public health. "I want to be part of the change," says Ogiamien, who has already received her M.A. in African Studies and is on track to have her M.P.H. by December.

Ogiamien’s ultimate goal is to run a nonprofit organization that delivers health promotion and AIDS prevention programs in English-speaking West Africa. "Having both degrees will open doors and give me the credibility that I need to move in different circles," she says.

Matthew Gerlach (M.P.H. ’81, M.B.A.) can attest to the value of a concurrent degree program. "It's helped me establish a level of credibility within organizations in very short order," says Gerlach. As a senior vice president at Kaiser Permanente, Gerlach is service area manager for the San Fernando, Santa Clarita and Antelope valleys, responsible for overseeing the operations and forming strategic plans with Kaiser’s medical group partners in that region. "I'm able to bring to bear not only the degrees, which look good on the résumé, but the actual experience and knowledge behind those degrees," Gerlach explains. "I find I use both the M.P.H. and the M.B.A. It's a good combination."

Gerlach believes the opportunity to learn about hospital administration from more than one educational perspective was particularly useful. Others have found similar advantages to the dual-degree approach. "The real benefit is that the knowledge from the two programs plays off of each other," Deland says. In her last two years, she explains, she was writing papers on health law that would not have been possible without the knowledge she gained from both sides of the campus. Deland’s association with the School of Public Health was also instrumental in helping her secure an internship at the WHO, where she is currently serving as a legal officer for the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control while pursuing a Ph.D. in health law at the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health.

Reflecting on the experience of going through two rigorous programs at once, Deland quips: "It was totally brutal. I never slept, I was cranky all the time, and my family couldn't wait for spring 2001 to come. But the outcome is that I've distinguished myself in a way that is eye-catching. Now, as far as job prospects, I get a lot of attention from people in many different fields. That's very gratifying."