

SITE VISIT TEAM
OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
ON THE
GRADUATE PROGRAMS IN PUBLIC HEALTH
IN THE
DEPARTMENT OF PREVENTIVE MEDICINE AND BIOMETRICS
AT THE
UNIFORMED SERVICES UNIVERSITY OF THE HEALTH SCIENCES

COUNCIL ON EDUCATION FOR PUBLIC HEALTH

SITE VISIT DATES: November 17 - 18, 2005

SITE VISIT TEAM:

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Site Visit Team Observations and Recommendations

The major task of a site visit team from the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH) is to evaluate the performance of a public health educational program against a set of established evaluation criteria and make a recommendation regarding an appropriate accreditation decision. At the time of a site visit, however, there are also opportunities to offer advice that is more consultative in nature. Assessment of the Master of Public Health (MPH) degree program offered by the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USUHS) against the accreditation standards is presented in the first part of this report. That assessment, which is endorsed by the CEPH governing body and becomes the official report, relates to demonstrating a minimum level of performance in the areas defined by the accreditation criteria. In many cases, however, the accreditation process provides an unusual opportunity to address issues that may be outside the concerns that are prescribed by the criteria or that relate to optimum levels of performance rather than meeting minimum standards. In this sense, the accreditation review process can contribute to quality enhancement of an educational program. It is within this framework that the site visit team that reviewed the USUHS offers these additional observations and occasional recommendations. It is hoped that this second section of the report, which is not formally adopted by the CEPH governing body or submitted to university officials, may provide helpful guidance to program officials.

Strengths

The site visit team observed several notable strengths, including the following:

- 1) The program fosters a collegial environment between students and faculty in which students view faculty as exceptionally approachable and genuinely interested in their success. Students commented that they believe that their instructors want them to do well and are willing to go out of their way, if necessary, to accommodate student needs. Faculty confirmed that they are generally available to students five days a week, not merely during pre-scheduled office hours. One faculty member noted that when students e-mail a question in the morning, faculty typically address the concern or meet with the student before the day's end.
- 2) Students also perceive program faculty as flexible and generally open to suggestions for improvement. A number of students commented that faculty take student evaluations seriously and are willing to implement changes based on received feedback. Students also praised faculty for "checking in" and soliciting comments throughout the quarter rather than waiting until the course's completion. Additionally, faculty are willing to modify exam dates, paper due dates, etc. to coordinate with students' other courses.
- 3) Since the time of the last CEPH review, the program has instituted a course and a comprehensive set of policies and procedures governing MPH students' practicum and culminating experience. As a result, the practicum and independent project now provide students with valuable and well-

supported opportunities to apply their classroom training to public health practice. The individual attention and thorough assessment that students receive in this process is commendable.

- 4) The program effectively leverages the benefits of both its geographic and administrative locations. Faculty from USUHS' other departments and other federal agency personnel provide adjunct faculty, guest lecturers, research collaborators and assistance with program evaluation. USUHS' situation on the Bethesda Naval Medical Center Campus provides ready access to resources including the National Library of Medicine and the National Institutes of Health facilities.
- 5) The Biostatistics Research Center, housed in the department, is a valuable asset insofar as it assists students and faculty in their own research and provides opportunities for faculty to serve their colleagues throughout the university by providing consultative services. The graduate programs director commented that, in the process of advising other researchers on the center's behalf, program faculty have forged ongoing, collaborative, interdisciplinary research relationships throughout the university.
- 6) The site visitors were impressed by the residency board exam high scores and the program's graduation rates.

Concerns

Several concerns were identified by the site visit team. These included the following:

- 1) While both the self-study and comments to the site visit team indicate that the program intends to adopt and formalize ongoing evaluation, the absence of such procedures is cause for concern, particularly since the last CEPH site visit identified a number of ways in which the program would benefit from formalizing evaluation processes.
- 2) The lack of measurable objectives, particularly at the level of those institutional objectives that relate to the program's instructional, research and service goals, makes it extremely difficult for the program to assess its overall performance.
- 3) Similarly, the absence of targeted outcome measures complicates planning and improvement efforts.
- 4) Program faculty and students suffer from the current limitations on physical space. Faculty members indicated that cramped office space inhibits their ability to meet with students or colleagues and particularly limits their ability to provide privacy needed for addressing student concerns that require confidentiality. Common space, such as a student lounge or program computer lab, which is currently not available for MPH or DrPH students, assists in student community-building and enhances students' experiences.
- 5) The program could benefit from expanding linkages with non-federal resources. Although the program's mission clearly dictates strong ties to the federal government in general and the military in particular, both students and faculty members commented to site visitors on the ways in which civilian students, guest lecturers, and preceptors enhance the educational environment. As one

alumnus indicated to the site visit team, in a military environment that increasingly collaborates with private contractors, understanding private industry's methods and approaches is an important asset for military health personnel.

Evaluation

The greatest concern of the site visit team was related to evaluation. At present, the graduate programs lack a formalized evaluation plan. Moreover, as of yet, the graduate programs have not identified appropriate outcome measures for all areas of performance and have not quantified many of the outcome measures it has identified. This lack of quantification is also true for the program objectives. Although it appears that efforts are underway to establish a more thorough evaluation plan, it is not clear that these efforts have been steadily progressing over recent years or that the pace at which this process will move in the future will be steady. The site visit team views enhancement of evaluation efforts as a top priority.

It is hoped that the department will develop an evaluation plan that will allow it to adequately measure its performance and grow in response to its findings. After establishment of a concrete evaluation plan, the next step will be to ensure measurability of all programmatic objectives and outcome measures. Although quantification of objectives and outcome measures can be a difficult task, developing targets is an important step that will allow the department to thoroughly assess its graduate programs against self-identified objectives.

Another step that will be helpful to the department is the development or formalization of systems for monitoring the objectives and outcome measures identified. In some instances, department officials report a reliance on systems outside the department that are described as "antiquated." While the site visit team has no expectation that the department can control change of these systems, the department does have control of its own tracking systems. Establishment of such a system or systems to monitor the program against its identified objectives and outcome measures will facilitate the evaluation process and decrease frustration related to obtaining such data.

Distance Learning

The site visit team spent considerable time discussing the possible development of a distance learning program with faculty. Faculty are in the midst of discussions amongst themselves about the pros and cons of a distance learning program as well as the most appropriate way to incorporate such a program into the existing infrastructure. The site visit team echoes the concerns of several faculty about the department's current ability to support a distance learning program, specifically in terms of added strain on faculty. In discussions with the university president, it became clear that the need for increased faculty

and enhanced systems to support a distance learning program is appreciated at all levels of administration.

The department is to be commended for its thoughtful consideration of the advantages and challenges of starting a distance learning program. The site visit team encourages the department to continue its discussions, bearing in mind the characteristics that make this program unique. Some of those characteristics, such as the fast pace, the opportunity to intermingle with other branches of the uniformed service and the very nature of having uniformed service members as students, may not easily lend themselves to a distance learning format. Taking these and other factors into consideration, the site visit team felt the most promising model discussed was one that would allow newly accepted students to take some of the core courses through a distance learning format prior to reporting to the university in July. This model would give students who desire it a head start and allow room for more electives during their on-campus studies.

Doctor of Public Health Degree (DrPH) Program

The site visit team identified some concerns about the administration of the DrPH program. However, due to the small sample of DrPH students to whom the site visit team spoke, it was unclear whether the problems are universal or limited to a small number of students. Nonetheless, a discussion of the issue is warranted due to the nature of the concerns raised.

A limited perception exists among students that the DrPH program lacks the attention and coordination that other programs in the department are afforded. It was reported to the site visit team that DrPH students are given inconsistent information and guidance throughout their course of study. Moreover, there have reportedly been course scheduling conflicts that prohibit DrPH students from taking the courses they need to earn their degree. Lastly, the lack of availability of office or other working space for DrPH students is a hindrance to their education.

Given the information about the DrPH program provided to the site visit team, it would be appropriate for the DPMB to explore student concerns and review, at a minimum, the administration of the program. There appears to be a difference in the quality of the administrative aspects of the DrPH program and other degree programs in the department. It was not clear to the site visit team what the effect of the administrative issues were on the quality of education provided to DrPH students. However, it was clear that some aspects of the management of the program negatively affect the overall educational experience of at least a small number of DrPH students. Further research into this area is encouraged.

Agenda

Council on Education for Public Health

Graduate Programs in Public Health
Department of Preventive Medicine & Biometrics
Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences

Thursday, November 17, 2005

- 7:40 am Meeting with Self-Study Coordinator

David Cruess, Deputy Chair, Biometrics & Vice Chair for Graduate Programs
- 8:00 am Meeting with Program/Department Administration

Gerald Quinnan, Professor and Chair, Department of Preventive Medicine & Biometrics
David Cruess, Deputy Chair, Biometrics & Vice Chair for Graduate Programs
Tomoko Hooper, Asst. Professor & Director, Graduate Research & Practicum Programs
Galen Barbour, Professor & Director, Division of Health Services Administration
Kenneth Kinnamon, Professor & Director, Centers for Preventive Medicine & Public Health
- 9:15 am Meeting with Core Teaching Faculty

David Cruess, Deputy Chair, Biometrics & Vice Chair for Graduate Programs
Robert Lipnick, Assistant Professor & Director, Division of Epidemiology & Biostatistics
Ronald Gimbel, Asst. Professor, Division of Health Services Administration
Richard Palmer, Asst. Professor, Division of Social & Behavioral Sciences
Tomoko Hooper, Asst. Professor & Director, Graduate Research & Practicum Programs
Gary Morris, Asst. Professor, Division of Environmental & Occupational Health
Lillian Shepherd, Asst. Professor, Division of Health Services Administration
- 10:45 am Break
- 11:00 am Meeting with Residency Program Directors

Dana Bradshaw, Asst. Professor & Director, General Preventive Medicine Residency
Timothy Mallon, Asst. Professor & Director, Occupational Medicine Residency
Kenneth Schor, Deputy Director, General Preventive Medicine Residency
Francesca Litow, Asst. Professor & Deputy Director, Occupational Medicine Residency
- 12:00 noon Lunch with Students

Eric Garges
Rodney Wadley
Julie Krygier
Carolyn Oyster
Cindy Tamminga
Catherine Bruder
Patrick High
Cate McManus
Misa Okamoto
Michael Wynn
- 1:30 pm Meeting with Teaching Faculty

Gary Hook, Asst. Professor, Division of Environmental & Occupational Health
Martha Turner, Asst. Professor & Director, Air Force International Health Program
Galen Barbour, Professor & Director, Division of Health Services Administration
Richard Andre, Professor & Vice Chair, Division of Tropical Public Health
Donald Roberts, Professor, Division of Tropical Public Health
Robert Lipnick, Assistant Professor, Division of Epidemiology & Biostatistics
Richard Thomas, Asst. Professor, Occupational Medicine Residency
- 3:30 pm Break

3:45 pm Meeting with Alumni & Practicum Preceptors

Brent Gibson
Danny Shiau
Michael Meier
Heather Halvorson
Edward Kilbane

5:00 pm Adjourn to Executive Session

Friday, November 18, 2005

7:40 am Meeting with Graduate Programs Office Staff

David Cruess, Deputy Chair, Biometrics & Vice Chair for Graduate Programs
Tomoko Hooper, Asst. Professor & Director, Graduate Research & Practicum Programs
Galen Barbour, Professor & Director, Division of Health Services Administration
Gary Gacksetter, Former Director & Professor, Department of Epidemiology & Biostatistics

8:00 am Meeting with University President

Charles Rice, President
Nathalie Valetter-Silver, Vice President for Special Projects

8:30 am Meeting with Dean

Larry Laughlin, Dean, School of Medicine

9:00 am Executive Session of the Team

12:45 pm Exit Interview