

RESPONSE  
TO THE  
COUNCIL ON EDUCATION FOR PUBLIC HEALTH  
SITE-VISIT TEAM REPORT  
ON THE  
REVIEW FOR ACCREDITATION  
OF THE  
GRADUATE PROGRAMS IN PUBLIC HEALTH  
DEPARTMENT OF PREVENTIVE MEDICINE AND BIOMETRICS  
AT THE  
UNIFORMED SERVICES UNIVERSITY OF THE HEALTH SCIENCES  
MAY 1, 2006

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### Introduction:

The re-accreditation Site Visit conducted by the Council on Education for Public Health took place on November 17-18, 2005, in the Department of Preventive Medicine and Biometrics (PMB) at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USUHS), Bethesda, Maryland. The Site Visit team consisted of the following individuals: Phoebe Lindsey Barton, Ph.D. (Chair), Eddy A. Bresnitz, M.D., M.S., Alicia Davis Cooper, MPH, (coordinator), and Mollie Mulvanity, MPH (observer). On January 6, 2006, the PMB Department received the draft report for the Site Visit team and was invited to respond in writing to the report. This is the Department's response to the Site Visit report.

### Overall comments:

The PMB Department appreciates the thorough and thoughtful review of our Graduate Programs in Public Health. While undergoing scrutiny by outside expert reviewers can often be an unpleasant experience, our interactions with the Site Visit team before, during, and after their visit were pleasant and collegial. Even though our program is unique in many respects, with a student body comprised largely of uniformed services personnel, we have no corrections to make to the draft report. We took all comments and suggestions for improvement seriously and have worked diligently to address them in the months since the Site Visit. We made some immediate changes in the Department's operations and have developed some intermediate and long-term goals for program modifications as well. While the "partially met" Criterion X.A was our most serious deficiency, we have responded to comments within all criteria that were "met with commentary." Our PMB Self Study Committee has continued to organize and spearhead changes that we think will make our graduate programs the best that they can be. These changes, in response to the Site Visit team's comments, are outlined below by criterion.

### Specific response by criterion:

Criterion I: *"It was not clear that the program has identified or put in place a process for periodic review and revision of the mission, goals, and objectives"*.

While this point is addressed further in Criterion X, the Department Chair, with the advice of the Vice-Chairs and Self-Study Committees, completely reconstructed the membership of the Program Evaluation Subcommittee of the Graduate Affairs Committee. In addition, a policy statement concerning the operation of the Subcommittee was rewritten. The Subcommittee is charged with conducting an annual review of the mission, goals, and objectives of the program and reporting its findings to the Graduate Affairs Committee. The Graduate Affairs Committee, or an ad hoc committee under its control, will be responsible for any needed revision of the mission, goals, or objectives.

Criterion III: *“Extensive committee structure may insure a wide range of faculty participation, but it also absorbs a sizable proportion of faculty time.”*

The Chair of the Department convened a series of meetings of the Vice Chairs to address not only the committee structure of the Department, but the overall structure of the entire Department. Policies were rewritten to describe the expected meeting frequency for each committee, and most committees were to meet at most quarterly throughout the year. Broad-based faculty participation on committees will be encouraged in order to reduce the workload of those who regularly serve. However, participation by junior tenure track faculty will be limited to one major committee, and no faculty member shall serve on more than two major committees within the Department. The Vice-Chairs will also meet annually to perform a periodic review of committee charters and the need for the continuation of each committee.

An effort to simplify the overall Department structure has also begun. The goal will be to reduce the number of independent operating components (i.e., divisions, programs, and centers) from twelve to approximately seven. This change should occur over the next six months.

Criterion IV: *“Space is currently at a premium, and relief from space constraints appears to be much needed but not yet fully resolved.”*

*“The adequacy of faculty and other resources may need to be reevaluated in light of potential program expansion.”*

Unfortunately, acquisition of space is not under the control of the Department. Space creation and allocation has traditionally been at the discretion of the University President, with input from the University Space Committee. However, the Space Committee has struggled in recent years to keep pace with identified needs and, as a result, requests for additional space have not been adequately addressed. The recently installed, new USUHS President, Dr. Rice, realized that the system was broken and disbanded the existing Space Committee shortly after taking office in July 2006. The PMB Department is hopeful that the creation of a new Space Committee will lead to better resolution of our space constraints. The new Space Committee is currently soliciting direct input from the faculty at large through the Faculty Senate about space requirements.

In addition, the University President has placed the construction of the new office and classroom building (Building E), which has been long-delayed, on a fast track. Groundbreaking will soon take place, and construction is expected to be completed by the summer of 2007. It is anticipated that our Department will be occupying major parts of this new building. The President has also announced that planning for another large campus building (Building F) will begin shortly. While space continues to be an important issue, we are optimistic that, with the aggressive leadership of the new President, our space needs will be addressed.

The adequacy of faculty and other resources is under a continual process of evaluation. Any program expansion must be accompanied by additional faculty billets, space, equipment, and funding support. Unlike civilian universities, a significant proportion of our faculty and staff are in the uniformed services, and, as such, cannot stay on the faculty for extended periods of time. On the other hand, this turnover of faculty and staff allows the Department to remain flexible in responding to evolving program demands.

One example of program expansion is in the area of distance learning. The Dean of the School of Medicine has been very supportive in this area. He has funded not only the software and training needs of the Department faculty and staff, but also funded, through his discretionary resources, the addition of a distance learning educational specialist to assist the faculty in creating and administering on-line courses. Significant expansion in the distance learning effort in the Department will not be undertaken unless there is a significant increase in the number of faculty and staff hired to support this area.

One new program has been added within the past year, the DoD/NIAID Infectious Disease Clinical Research Program. This program will establish a clinical research education program within the Department, and will foster infectious disease clinical research throughout the DoD. The program will fund several new faculty positions specifically to support this program, and the University has made adequate space available for this program.

Criterion V.B: *“In the MTM&H practicum program, few formal processes have been put in place to administer the program... the lack of a formalized system for gaining approval of a practicum and evaluating a practicum is potentially problematic.”*

This deficiency has now been addressed. Administration of the MTM&H practicum is the responsibility of the Director of the Division of Tropical Public Health, who approves and evaluates all MTM&H practicum experiences. The MTM&H practicum is clearly designated as a graduate course (PMO 563), and measurable objectives have been written to evaluate student performance.

Criterion V.C: *“A review of the course syllabi showed a lack of consistency in the quality of the course learning objectives.”*

In December, we examined a sample of course folders and found a significant problem with the overall quality of the written learning objectives, especially in terms of meeting all criteria for measurable learning objectives. The PMB Educational Specialist (Laura Casper) was then tasked by the Director, Graduate Programs, to do a complete audit of the learning objectives for every course in our graduate programs curriculum. Some issues were found across all areas of the curriculum. A training module on writing measurable learning objectives was developed to help our faculty revise their course

objectives. Over the course of the past 3 months, all identified deficiencies have been corrected.

Criterion VIII.C: *“The program will benefit from both challenging to work for more diversity among professors and from developing creative strategies to incorporate diverse individuals throughout the program in other roles.*”

While the diversity of the pool of eligible uniformed health professionals to fill faculty billets is limited, the Department will intensify its efforts to recruit and retain a more diverse faculty. For the third consecutive year, Dr. Georgia Harris, an Air Force reservist and a professor at Portland State University, who specializes in under-represented minority recruitment and equal employment opportunity, will be spending the summer with us. Besides giving seminars to students, faculty, and staff on these issues, she will be working with the Office of Recruitment and Diversity to develop strategies to aid in the recruitment of a more diverse faculty for the Department.

Faculty members responsible for inviting speakers for the weekly PMB seminars, Grand Rounds, and individual courses will be required to seek more diversity in their choice of individuals whenever possible. The Department will increase its collaboration with the USU Center for Health Disparities and use this Center as a resource for guest speakers. As part of this collaboration, additional lectures on minority health issues will be incorporated into PMO 680 (Introduction to Public Health), PMO 531 (Program Planning and Development), and PMO 681 (Current Problems in Preventive Medicine and Public Health). In addition, the Center will be a major participant in the Project and Practicum Fair, conducted as part of PMO 671 (Introduction to the MPH Project and Practicum), where students meet with potential research mentors and/or practicum site preceptors to explore opportunities for their required MPH research project or practicum experiences.

Criterion IX.B: *“Only 18% of the matriculated students in 2005 were ethnic minorities, despite the fact that ethnic minorities constituted 41% of the applicant pool.”*

Although every ethnic minority student applicant was given full consideration for acceptance into our program, not all applicants were offered admission, and not all of those offered a place actually accepted the offer. Our program has a limited number of slots for an increasingly large pool of applicants. Once our qualified, mission-essential uniformed students are accommodated (which constitutes 85% of our Master’s degree students), we traditionally have only 2 or 3 additional openings for civilian MPH students each year. Thus, part of the difference in the proportions of ethnic minority applicants and matriculants reflects the relatively small number of available openings for the diverse civilian applicant pool. Additionally, some civilians decline offers of admission because we have no scholarship funding for civilian Master’s degree students and limited stipends for doctoral students, even though there is no tuition charge.

As part of an effort to attract ethnic minority applicants, the Graduate Program Director (Dr. David Cruess) has been working with the USU Center for Health Disparities, where he also serves as an Advisory Board member. The Center identifies minority students interested in the health sciences and offers them a variety of experiences with mentors at USUHS. One of these students, who is interested in public health, was offered the opportunity to work with PMB faculty and Center professionals over the next academic year to improve his academic record and enhance his chances for acceptance into our graduate program. We are hopeful that this program can be expanded over the next few years to include additional ethnic minority students.

Criterion IX.C: *“A robust or formal career counseling and placement service for civilian students does not exist.”*

The number of civilian students in PMB graduate programs has never been larger than 10 at any one time, and most of these students were older adults who were already employed in full-time government positions. These positions are often in federal agencies that allow their employees to attend USU in order to acquire specific skills and return after graduation to their former jobs. Typically, 1 or 2 civilian students each year come to USUHS without ongoing affiliation with another agency. While it is not feasible to set up a formal career counseling and placement service for so few students, the Graduate Program Director identifies particular faculty members to serve as career counselors for these students. These mentors are usually in addition to the student’s academic and research advisors. Additionally, the networking afforded by all the classroom and practicum opportunities often leads to post-graduation job placement among our civilian students.

Criteria X.A: *“The alumni survey has not been institutionalized, and its future is uncertain”.*

The Dean of the School of Medicine provided bridge funds to hire a support person to aid in the preparation of this year’s alumni survey. The 2006 Alumni Survey was successfully launched electronically on March 27, 2006. A new support position for the Graduate programs office has been created and active recruitment is underway to identify a qualified individual. One of the major duties of this new hire will be the conduct of an annual alumni survey.

*“The Program Review and Evaluation Subcommittee has not met on a consistent basis.”*

The Program Review and Evaluation Subcommittee (PES) has been ineffectual over the past few years. Therefore, much of the responsibility for program evaluation fell instead onto the Graduate Programs’ or Department Chair’s office. One of the first actions following the Site Visit was the reorganization of the PES, and it is now meeting regularly.

*“The Department has not identified measurable ways to evaluate neither its performance, nor the effectiveness of its evaluation and planning efforts.”*

This was clearly the most serious deficiency noted in the Site Visit report. It resulted in this criterion being judged to be only “partially met”. A large number of faculty and staff have engaged in efforts to correct this deficiency. The Chair of our Graduate Affairs Committee, Dr. Galen Barbour, has led Departmental efforts to address this specific issue.

As a first step, the Program Evaluation Subcommittee (PES) was completely reconstituted, and a faculty member with experience in program evaluation and continuous improvement concepts was selected to take the lead as chair. The members of the Subcommittee also include members of the faculty with interest or experience in program evaluation and/or quality improvement efforts, as well as two student representatives (MPH and doctoral programs). Under new leadership, the Subcommittee has established a monthly meeting schedule in response to the recent CEPH site visit report.

A second step to address the identified need for performance measures was to establish three working groups in the major functional areas of teaching, research, and service. Each of these groups reviewed examples of program materials provided by CEPH as guides to the development of a performance measurement system. Each working group then developed a set of performance measures specific to the Department of Preventive Medicine and Biometrics Graduate Programs at the Uniformed Services University. Each group met weekly during January and February, 2006, to discuss and consider various options for performance measures aimed at reflecting progress toward achieving our major program goals and objectives. As each group worked to identify appropriate program evaluation metrics and performance targets, issues such as data availability and frequency of measurement were also considered. The Chairs of all three working groups formally presented their recommendations to the PES in early March. The PES in turn concurred with the proposed metrics in general and recommended that they be incorporated into the quality improvement process for PMB Graduate Programs. A survey instrument was then developed based on performance measurement documents provided by the working groups. The survey was intended to collect current and immediate past year information at the individual faculty member level.

On March 23, 2006, the PMB Chair called a mandatory faculty meeting to implement this new baseline survey using selected teaching, research, and service performance measures. Survey responses were key-entered into a database, and the results were shared with each of the working groups and the PES. The self-reported performance levels were reviewed against standards set *a priori*, and those areas in which observed performance did not meet that expected for the Department, based on stated goals and objectives, were targeted for further evaluation. These target areas will be the focus of improvement efforts within the Department for the next year.

The performance measures and standards for every objective in the three major areas of teaching, research, and service are included in the following seven tables. The tables define the metrics used to measure performance at the level of the individual faculty member and the performance targets for the faculty and the program as a whole. In addition, the performance of the Department against these goals for the current and the past academic years is displayed.

Table 1: Teaching Objective #1- Continuous improvement of teaching

Measure	Performance Expectation	Dept. Goal	AY 04-05	AY 05-06
<b>Participation in the evaluation of classroom teaching performance</b>				
Direct observation of peers	Review 1 class/year	80% faculty meet the performance expectation	88%	92% to date
Student feedback	75% of students in each course complete course evaluation	75% of courses meet the minimum expectation	80%	100% to date
	Review student feedback for each course	100% of instructors review student feedback	98%	100% to date
	90% of students complete exit survey	100% of surveys reviewed by Graduate Affairs Committee	100%	pending
<b>Participation in the continuous improvement of personal instructional methodology by attending educational sessions</b>				
Educational sessions	Attend 1/year	70% faculty meet performance expectation	71%	67% to date

Table 2: Teaching Objective #2 - Maintaining currency of faculty knowledge

Measure	Performance Expectation	Dept. Goal	AY 04-05	AY 05-06
<b>Promote faculty participation in CE</b>				
Licensed/certified faculty	Obtain CE to maintain license/certification	100% for licensed/certified faculty	100%	100%
Other faculty	Attend 1 CE conference or course/year	50% for other faculty meet performance expectation	56%	52% to date

Table 3: Teaching Objective #3 - Providing academic counseling and mentoring

Measure	Performance Expectation	Dept. Goal	AY 04-05	AY 05-06
<b>Active involvement in advising activity</b>				
Serve as academic advisor	1 student/year	50% of eligible faculty meet performance expectation	37%	60%
Serve as graduate student project reviewer/grader	1 student/year	50% of eligible faculty meet performance expectation	56%	pending

Table 4: Research Objective #1 - Research activity

Measure	Value	Performance Expectation	Dept. Goal	AY 04-05	AY 05-06
<b>Research activity</b>					
Proposals submitted	2 pts	2 points per faculty per year	80% of faculty meet performance expectation	82%	87% to date
Proposals newly funded	3 pts				
Proposals ongoing	2 pts				
Major collaborative proposals on-going	1 pt				

Table 5: Research Objective #2 - Research dissemination

Measure	Value	Performance Expectation	Dept. Goal	AY 04-05	AY 05-06
<b>Research dissemination</b>					
Senior-authored papers	3 pts	2 points per faculty per year	80% of the faculty meet performance expectation	84%	72% to date
Non-senior authored papers	2 pts				
Non-peer-reviewed papers	1 pt				
Published abstracts	0.5 pt				
Scientific presentations	0.5 pt				

Table 6: Research Objective #3 - Involvement with student research activity

Measure	Performance Expectation	Dept. Goal	AY 04-05	AY 05-06
<b>Active involvement in research advising activity</b>				
Serve as primary research advisor	1 student every 3 years	50% of faculty meet performance expectation	52%	53%

Table 7: Service activity

Measure	Performance Expectation	Dept. Goal	AY 04-05	AY 05-06
Number of hours given in service, professional activities, community consultation and community partnership	>10 hrs per year per faculty	70% of faculty meet performance expectation	79%	90%

These performance standards, recommended by the three working groups (and approved by the faculty) are now in place. The Department has the ability to not only rate individual faculty members for promotion purposes, but to determine the performance of the program as a whole. The role of the PES has been redefined to include a broader responsibility for ongoing program performance monitoring.

The continuous quality improvement process functions as follows:

1. At the beginning of a rating period, each faculty member and their supervisor discuss expectations and goals for the upcoming rating period. Overall expectations for faculty performance in the areas of teaching, research, and service are reviewed. Certain items from the performance measurement list are designated as ‘critical’ elements for each particular faculty member’s academic accomplishments for the upcoming rating period. Other elements may be included as ‘expected but not critical’ or may be considered inappropriate and excluded. Ratings at the end of the period would be summarized in a ratings report, and the minimum individual performance level for all critical elements would have to be met in order to receive a rating of “Outstanding”. Attaining some but not all critical elements would result a rating of “Highly Satisfactory” or “Satisfactory.” A faculty member who meets some non-critical elements but does not meet any of the ‘critical’ elements could receive an “Unsatisfactory” rating. Academic

promotion and salary increases are tied to performance ratings for civilian faculty members.

2. Annually, the Director of Graduate Programs calls for a report from each faculty member. This report contains the same information included in the faculty member's recently completed rating report (plus responses on the items not included in their individual rating for program evaluation purposes). All information will be collected and compiled into an electronic database that will allow regular assessment and tracking of departmental performance measures against established targets. These performance measures can be translated into graphic displays to disseminate this information throughout the department.

3. On an annual basis each Spring Quarter, the Program Evaluation Subcommittee will undertake a review of the program's mission, goals, and objectives to determine whether any changes should be made. If changes are recommended, specifications will involve faculty from several disciplines and will require approval by the faculty as a whole. In addition, each quarter the PES will conduct a review of key elements of the program and report on their findings to the Graduate Affairs Committee. The agenda for these reviews will be set at the beginning of each academic year and will include, but is not limited to the following: admissions data, exit survey data, course evaluations and instructor responses, performance of the Graduate Affairs Committee and its subcommittees, status and progress in diversity recruiting for faculty and students, and findings from the alumni survey. Actionable findings from these reviews will be forwarded promptly from the PES to the Graduate Affairs Committee, then to the Director of Graduate Programs and the Chair of PMB.

#### Concluding Comments:

While the entire re-accreditation experience can be daunting, it is clear to the Department of Preventive Medicine and Biometrics that this has been exceptionally beneficial to its Graduate Programs in Public Health. We took each and every comment and criticism seriously. We made a good-faith effort not only to correct deficiencies, but to put in place processes and procedures to prevent the recurrence of these problems. Recent governmental decisions have put the Uniformed Services University into a trajectory for increased growth and influence, and our quality improvement program through the CEPH Self-Study and re-accreditation process will ensure that PMB Graduate Programs are ready for this challenge.