Public Health and Health Sciences

A School offering B.S. degrees Communication Disorders, Kinesiology, Nutrition, and Public Health Sciences; the M.P.H. in core areas of Public Health and Public Health Practice; the M.A. in Communication Disorders; the M.S. in Kinesiology, Nutrition, and Public Health concentrations (Biostatistics, Community Health Education, Environmental Health Sciences, Epidemiology, and Health Policy and Management); the Ph.D. in Kinesiology, Audiology and the Public Health concentrations; and the Doctor of Audiology (AuD) degree.

The Review Process

The School of Public Health and Health Sciences is accredited by the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH), which places primary emphasis on core public health programs but also reviews all degree programs offered within the same school. The final accreditation is to the entire School of Public Health and not an individual degree or department. In addition, Communication Disorders programs are accredited separately and on a different schedule by the Council on Academic Accreditation of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association; and the B.S. in Nutrition is accredited separately by the American Dietetics Association (ADA). Kinesiology undergoes a separate AQAD review.

The results of the 2014-15 CEPH review of the School of Public Health and Health Sciences are reported here. In addition to the site visit coordinator, Kristen Varol from CEPH, the CEPH site visit team included:

Christopher Atchison, University of Iowa, Chair
Craig Blakely, University of Louisville
Carol Azar, Kaiser Permanente

Main Issues

The School of Public Health and Health Sciences (SPHHS) had its accreditation renewed for a full seven-year term, through 2022. Continuation of the School’s accreditation reflects compliance with an array of standards including educational objectives, student outcomes, research innovation and workforce development.

The accreditation report describes a School whose faculty are trained in a variety of disciplines and whose relatively small student body and the inclusion of allied health degrees render the School’s environment conducive to interdisciplinary collaboration. SPHHS’s degree programs are organized from an “ecological perspective” that fosters the development of professional public health concepts and values. The School’s mission along with its supporting goals and objectives are clearly defined.

In 2004, three years prior to the last AQAD cycle, CEPH placed the School in a probationary period following the consolidation of three departments (biostatistics and epidemiology; environmental health sciences; and community health studies which is composed of community health education and health policy and management) into one department of public health. At the time, CEPH characterized this move as a “substantive change” that called into question the School’s “organizational structure and adequacy of faculty resources.”
In May 2007, the SPHHS underwent its CEPH site visit for reaccreditation and CEPH determined that the SPHHS had come into compliance and was released from probationary status. CEPH extended the SPHHS’ accreditation for a seven-year term through December 31, 2014, and determined that several criteria were partially met (out of compliance) and would require interim reporting. The SPHHS was required to submitted interim reports documenting that it had defined measureable service objectives, with clear targets; implemented a course, required for all MPH students, that adequately addressed the core area of health services administration; implemented learning objectives for all core courses; developed and implemented competencies for all degree programs; completed and implemented an evaluation plan for all objectives; developed means, beyond tracking course completion, to assess student attainment of competencies; implemented plans to track completion rates and job placement rates of those students matriculated in all degree programs; required students in all academic programs to enroll in coursework to address basic principles of epidemiology and public health; and developed a coordinated approach to workforce development that included a focus on providing educational opportunities to public health practitioners in identified areas of need. Over this seven year period, interim reports have been provided to CEPH to address these areas of noncompliance.

Based on the October 15-17, 2014 site visit, CEPH reviewers determined that the School has made substantial progress in its educational objectives, student outcomes, research innovation and workforce development.

The CEPH draft report from December 2014 listed a total of nine criteria that it determined to be “partially met” (out of 29 total accreditation criteria). The CEPH draft report made the following assessments of the areas that it deemed out of compliance and included recommendations to guide SPHHS toward compliance:

The criteria of concern included:

- **Criterion 1.2: Evaluation and Planning.** A more thoughtful and systematic process of data review to inform the direction of program and activities is needed. The recent hire of a data analyst to lead sustained evaluation processes beyond the strategic planning period should lead to a more articulated plan for monitoring, improving and accomplishing the School’s goals and objectives.

- **Criterion 1.7: Faculty and Other Resources.** The availability of space is inadequate and insufficient. The School is physically distributed across six locations of the University campus, which is fundamentally discordant with the collaborative nature of public health and negatively impacts the public health research and practice. The on-site tour of the space available revealed extraordinarily challenging space for classes, research and group work.

- **Criterion 2.5: Culminating Experience.** The comprehensive exam option available to M.P.H. students in one area did not adequately cover all core areas of public health.

- **Criterion 2.6: Required Competencies.** The review team indicated a lack of distinction between core and concentration-specific competencies, suggesting that the latter should not duplicate the former and should demonstrate a higher order of complexity. It recommended the development of a more detailed matrix tying course offerings to all competencies.

- **Criterion 2.7: Assessment Procedures.** Within the culminating experience for M.P.H. students, assessment of the extent to which students have gained knowledge of core competencies could be strengthened and made more consistent among faculty members and across departments and divisions.

- **Criteria 2.8, 2.10 and 2.11: Other Professional Degree Programs, Bachelor’s Degrees, and Academic Programs.** The committee recommended that the School systematically document that it fully covers the five core public health knowledge areas and, for students in kinesiology and communication disorders, expose them to the breadth of public health.
Criterion 4.2: Faculty Policies and Procedures. (1) Documentation of the appointment, promotion and tenure process does not reflect what occurs in operation; (2) Personnel Committees overseeing promotion and tenure decisions are composed of only three members; and (3) Non-tenure-track faculty are permitted to serve on the Personnel Committee.

Results of the Review

The SPHHS was allowed to respond in writing to the CEPH site visit team’s draft report, identify errors in the team’s report, and provide additional information for the CEPH Board of Councilors’ benefit so that they could make a well-informed final decision on the SPHHS’ accreditation. The SPHHS response to the criteria of concern included:

- Criterion 1.2: The School and the university systematically and annually collect primary data to provide information for evaluation purposes. These data are then analyzed by the SPHHS Dean, the SPHHS administrative leadership, SPHHS committees, and other faculty who make data-informed decisions about curriculum, facilities, budgets and other programs. The School has embraced both formal and informal feedback loops with a data communication plan to inform decision-making at all levels. This includes two additional communication channels related to planning and evaluation, added as a direct result of the CEPH review team’s findings which include an internal web portal for internal communication and an SPHHS Annual Report.

- Criterion 1.7: A programmatic and facilities review in collaboration with an outside consultant was completed in 2014, which provided three possible options for “right-sizing” the School and providing adequate space for faculty, staff and students. Decisions about future infrastructure are currently under consideration at the Chancellor’s office level.

- Criterion 2.5: Faculty in the relevant departments discussed and changed the culminating experience for its M.P.H. students in direct response to the review team’s findings.

- Criterion 2.6: A committee comprised of the SPHHS Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and M.P.H. departmental representatives reviewed the current competencies and made significant changes to them, which were then approved by the entire faculty.

- Criterion 2.7: The same committee as 2.6 reviewed the current assessment practices and agreed upon a common rubric for evaluating the integration of skills and knowledge linked to core competencies. This was approved by the entire faculty.

- Criteria 2.8, 2.10 and 2.11: Faculty and administrative leadership in the non-M.P.H. programs developed a detailed matrix that demonstrated the ways in which these degrees impart knowledge about the five core public health areas to their students. This additional information was submitted in an appendix as part of the SPHHS’ response.

- Criterion 4.2: The School reiterated that it follows University guidelines in assignment of faculty to service committees and that the sequence of promotion/tenure review does not deviate from these guidelines. Due to the unusual structure of the SPHHS at the time of the site visit, with one department of Public Health comprised of three divisions, the tenure and promotion process for faculty in the Department of Public Health was misunderstood by the site visit team.

At its June 2015 meeting, the CEPH Board of Councilors changed the findings for eight of the nine criteria from “partially met” to either “met”, or “met with commentary”, both of which are in compliance. The SPHHS was deemed “partially met” on one criterion, Criterion 1.7: Faculty and Other Resources, related to the inadequate and insufficient availability of space. The SPHHS is required to submit an interim report by May, 2016 that should provide evidence that the school has improved the physical space resources available for the school’s instruction and research programs.
Outcomes Assessment

The School of Public Health and Health Sciences has an established set of student learning objectives that cover both the core- and concentration-based competencies expected of a graduate from the program. Competencies are mapped to courses and students’ achievement of competencies is tracked at the level of the individual instructor within the context of the course.

The School of Public Health and Health Sciences incorporates systematic assessment measures to determine if these learning outcomes are being met, and for program evaluation and planning purposes. These include both direct and indirect measures such as assessment of student attainment through coursework (exams, papers, projects, case studies and presentations); mid-course and end-of-year student evaluations; needs assessments; and focus groups for integrated experience requirements.

Student Retention and Graduation Rates

The School of Public Health and Health Sciences has seen a tremendous increase in undergraduate student numbers, from approximately 570 for total undergraduate majors in 2005 to almost 2,000 total undergraduate majors in 2015. The School has substantially improved undergraduate student indicators, including four- and six-year outcomes and one-year retention rates of Entering First-Time Full-Time Students since the 2007-2008 CEPH reaccreditation. Data are presented below.

For the 2004 cohort (n=73), the four-year graduation rate was 34%. The most recent data from the 2010 cohort (n=281) indicate the four-year outcome has increased to 52%. For the 2004 cohort (n=73), the six-year graduation rate was 40%. The most recent data from the 2008 cohort (n=141) indicate the six-year graduation rate has increased to 48%. For the 2004 cohort the SPHHS one-year retention rate was 62%. The most recent data from 2013 indicate that the one-year retention rate has increased to 76%. All of these metrics are indicative of the excellent progress that the School of Public Health and Health Sciences has made over this time period, and that it continues to move in an upward trajectory.