Program Summary

Summary Title: Public Health: MPH
Applicable Programs: 51.2201 Public Health : Masters

Accreditation: Associated with an Accreditation Review.

Last Review Year:

Status: APPROVED

Major Changes

New program effective Fall 2005.

Strengths

Related to Accreditation Criteria
- Accredited in 2009 by the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH) for 5 years.
- The program has a clearly formulated and publically stated mission with supporting goals and objectives. The program fosters the development of professional public health values, concepts and ethical practice.
- The program is an integral part of an accredited institution of higher education and has the same level of independence and status accorded to professional schools in that institution.
- The program has an organizational setting conducive to teaching and learning, research and service. The organizational setting facilitates interdisciplinary communication, cooperation and collaboration. The organizational structure effectively supports the work of the program's constituents.
- The MPH degree program has at least 42 semester credit units in length.
- Students demonstrate an understanding of the public health core knowledge.
- In its short life the MPH faculty has already been acknowledged by the university and their professional organizations as being exceptional in their ability to translate public health content into asynchronous distance education curricula. This is documented by awards, peer reviewed publications and invited presentations. In addition, the MPH faculty are sought after to give guest lectures nationally in distance education seminars and to be mentors at UWF and other institutions.
- The program pursues active service activities, consistent with its mission, through which faculty and students contribute to the advancement of public health practice.
- The program engages in activities that support the professional development of the public health workforce.
- The program has a clearly defined faculty which, by virtue of its distribution, multidisciplinary nature, educational preparation, research and teaching competence, and practice experience, is able to fully support the programs mission, goals and objectives.
- The program has well-defined policies and procedures to recruit, appoint and promote qualified faculty, to evaluate competence and performance of faculty, and to support the professional development and advancement of faculty.
- The program recruits and promotes a diverse faculty and staff, and offers equitable opportunities to qualified individuals regardless of age, gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, religion or national origin.
Weaknesses

Related to Accreditation Criteria
- Strategic planning notes reflected the nascent state of the program’s strategic planning however the assessments were not well linked to the accreditation criteria. (1.2)
- Need to provide opportunities for student involvement in governance. (1.5)
- Faculty resources, relative to the number of students. (1.6)
- For an MPH program to be sustainable, resources must be commensurate with expected program operations in order to maintain quality and viability in teaching, research and service. (1.6)
- Lack of a defined curriculum for the generalist track. The generalist track offered by the program is not sufficiently developed. (2.1)
- Learning objectives associated with the internship appear to be written in isolation of the stated competencies for the core courses, and their relationship to the electives is unclear. (2.4)
- Ability of the culminating experience, as it is structured, to accurately assess whether or not students apply skills gained across the curriculum and demonstrate synthesis and integration of knowledge. (2.5)
- Learning objectives for elective courses have not yet been linked to program competency statements. (2.6)
- Program does not fully use the fieldwork and culminating experience as a method to evaluate competency attainment. (2.7)
- Barriers that inhibit a sustainable research agenda. (3.1)

Concerns

1. There is a concern as to whether recruitment efforts are focused appropriately. If the program continues to accept very distant students, finding appropriate placements for them may be more difficult, requiring more of the very limited amount of faculty time to oversee this entire process. (4.4)
2. The popularity of the program is likely to increase with accreditation but without a concomitant push to encourage enrollees to complete the program as quickly as possible, the matriculated student load will balloon. The current model of advising and responsiveness to student issues by faculty (very prompt and very often) is not likely to be sustainable. (4.5)
3. While the program prides itself on showing the geographic diversity of its students, it appears that there might be a disconnect between UWF’s role as a regional university and the more distant of its students. This may generate additional problems in finding supporting internships. (4.5)

Recommendations

Recommendations from the Accreditation Review Team and UWF Responses

1.2 CEPH Site Visit Team’s comment: Strategic planning notes reflect the nascent state of the program’s strategic planning however the assessments were not well linked to documentation in the criteria.

UWF’s Response: The UWF MPH is a fledgling program which will see a growth in documentation as assessment processes are applied over time and with this larger body of data we will see tighter and more effective linkage.

1.5 CEPH Site Visit Team’s Comment: Continued need to provide opportunities for student involvement in governance.

UWF’s Response: The Program routinely sends multiple emails to all students in the program several times prior to meetings of governing committees and continue to do so as part of our strategy for increasing student involvement in governance.

The Program created a student service organization, the Student Association for Public Health (SAPH), as a platform for encouraging and supporting student involvement in all aspects of the MPH program. A web site has been created where postings and chat rooms are available which promote interaction and camaraderie among students, staff and faculty.

The possibilities for dramatically improving student engagement in all activities within the program are rapidly evolving in a very positive direction, both through the student organization and through faculty partnerships with the community (see 3.1 below).

1.6 CEPH Site Visit Team’s Comment: For an MPH program to be sustainable, resources must be commensurate with expected program operations in order to maintain quality and viability in teaching, research and service. While operational at this time, the MPH program will rapidly reach a point where it will not be sustainable without significant resource allocation in the area.
of core faculty.

UWF Response: The highest priority for faculty lines within the College of Arts and Sciences has been placed on the Master of Public Health Program. In light of the general economic situation in Florida, we are continuing to move forward with a contingency plan for each core course, which involves positioning a minimum of 2 faculty or adjuncts to assume responsibility for each core and required course.

The reorganization of the MPH curriculum which will be accomplished by reducing the total number of courses that must be routinely offered will relieve some of the financial pressure and time-constraints on the program and the core faculty. This curricular reorganization will allow us to offer only one or two electives per semester, reducing programmatic cost, better focusing the educational experience within the core public health arena and freeing up core faculty time to participate more in other aspects of the program.

2.6 CEPH Site Visit Team's Comment: Lack of a defined curriculum for the generalist track: The generalist track offered by the program is not sufficiently developed

UWF's Response: We have examined our curriculum in light of comments regarding the undefined nature of the program. This programmatic evaluation has identified weaknesses in the initial proposed curriculum in place at the time of the site visit (November, 2008). We have employed input from our faculty, our MPH Steering Committee and our students (via survey) to restructure the curriculum around a practitioner theme that prescribes 36 of the 42 hours in the degree. The newly established 15 hrs of required courses now complement the 21 hrs in the core to provide a strong foundation on the practitioner emphasis of the UWF program. These courses provide students with a solid background in the design of epidemiological studies and appropriate statistical methods used in data evaluation; with an understanding and appreciation for the scientific basis of public health; with skills in the application of IT to problems and processes in public health; and with information and strategies for dealing effectively with natural and manmade disasters from the public health perspective.

2.4 CEPH Site Visit Team's Comment: The learning objectives associated with the internship appear to be written in isolation of the stated competencies for the core courses, and their relationship to the electives is unclear.

UWF's Response: With the curricular reorganization implemented for the UWF MPH there is now a clear set of competencies that cover courses comprising 36 of the 42 hrs in the degree, all of which will be represented in the internship experience. In addition, we have revamped the internship competencies to dovetail with those of the core and required courses. We will be able to assess student performance in the electives during the Comprehensive Exam.

2.5 CEPH Site Visit Team's Comment: Ability of the culminating experience, as it is structured, to accurately assess whether or not students apply skills gained across the curriculum and demonstrate synthesis and integration of knowledge

UWF's Response: Representative competencies for all core and required courses taken by the student will now be included in the Culminating Experience (this amounts to 38 out of the 42 credit hours in the degree). Students registering for the Internship will be required to use the Table of Competencies for MPH Internships to develop the project prospectus.

2.7 CEPH Site Visit Team's Comment: The program do not fully use the fieldwork and culminating experience as a method to evaluate competency attainment.

UWF's Response: The curricular restructuring, redesign of the internship competencies to align them with the competencies for the core and required courses, and careful assessment of core, required and elective course competencies in the comprehensive exam will provide a thorough and direct link between assessment and course competencies.

3.1 CEPH Site Visit Team's Comment: Numerous barriers inhibit a sustainable research agenda within the UWF MPH program.

UWF's Response: The changes implemented in the curriculum (see 2.1 above) will increase faculty efficiency and loosen the time-constraints operating on faculty. This in turn will allow us to engage in the projects and grant collaborations currently on the table.

Additional Comments

The Confirmation of Processes is available at the following URL:

http://uwf.edu/academic/datafiles/Cp_Public_Health.pdf