

Memorandum

Date: 7 November 2012

To: University Senate

From: Thomas A. Discenna, Chair
Senate Planning & Review Committee

Re: Proposal for a Masters in Public Health

The Senate Planning Review Committee (SPRC) reviewed the proposal from the School of Health Sciences for a new degree program leading to a Master of Public Health (MPH). The SPRC read, reviewed, and discussed the proposal and offers the following summary and conclusions.

Summary

The School of Health Sciences (SHS) proposes a new program leading to a Master of Public Health. The SHS describes the program as a “generalist, professional program that delivers the core and cross-cutting competencies established by the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH) and the Association of Schools of Public Health (ASPH).” The program would graduate students trained to promote public health and improve the delivery of health promotion services. The SHS identifies the need for these services through a number of startling statistics related to the public health in the state of Michigan (for instance, the increase in infant mortality rates among certain populations within the state). On the basis of this evidence and projections of the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the SHS indicates a demand for holders of the MPH degree in the state and more broadly,

The SHS plans a full-time cohort of ten students in the first year with incremental growth to a steady state of eighteen in years four and five of the program. These students would be recruited from a pool of graduating undergraduate students from the school as well as professionals in the field of public health within the Metro Detroit region.

The SHS cites evidence from a student survey as well as a survey from potential employers to indicate the demand for this degree program.

The mission of the MPH degree is to “prepare graduate students to preserve, protect, and promote the health of human populations through organized community effort.” The SHS maintains that this mission accords with all aspects of the “teaching, research and service missions of the university. For example, the SHS claims that the MPH will “provide theoretically sound and evidence-based instruction in the core public health competencies,” “engage in community-based participatory research to improve the health of vulnerable populations,” as well as “use expertise to help improve the capacity of local agencies through membership in various organizations.”

The SHS provided an extensive comparison of the proposed MPH with peer institution in the state (University of Michigan, Wayne State University, Michigan State University to cite some examples) and region (University of Illinois at Chicago, Northern Illinois University, Case Western Reserve University). The program envisioned here is consistent with the programs (similar number of credit hours, requirements and electives) with these and other institutions but differentiated in its specific focus on Public Health and that it is a generalist degree with training in all the traditional public health disciplines (biostatistics, environmental science, epidemiology, and education). The program is also guided by “the principles of a service learning-based educational model” through which students will learn to apply their skills in “Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR).

The proposed program makes use of existing faculty expertise in the area of Public Health. There are, at present, three tenure-track faculty members with significant experience in Public Health. The program projects a need for three new tenure-line positions in years two, three and four during the initial implementation of the MPH. The SHS indicates that the current space and equipment allocations are sufficient for implementation and a report from Shawn Lombardo concludes that the library needs of the new degree are modest and covered in the pro-forma budget.

After a thorough review, the SPRC has identified the following items as strengths and concerns of this proposal:

Strengths

1. The SPRC is convinced that the program responds to a need for such programs in the local community.
2. The committee believes that the proposed degree advances the Mission of the university as well as the goal of expanding our offerings in health related disciplines.
3. The proposal makes use of existing faculty expertise, not only within the SHS, but also through interdisciplinary course work in various other units throughout the university.
4. The committee finds that the program fits with the university’s goal of offering professionally oriented graduate degrees.

Concerns

1. The SPRC notes that while service learning is advanced as a unique aspect of the program that it is difficult to see precisely how it is being operationalized in the current curriculum.
2. The committee expressed some misgivings concerning the cohort approach, noting that the student survey provided by the SHS indicates significant support for alternative structures. The committee is questions how the cohort structure will fit with the goal of offering the degree to current professionals in the field of public health. A related concern, questioned whether offering classes only in the day would similarly restrict recruiting possibilities.

3. The committee also notes that as OU expands its offering in professionally oriented graduate work (the program under review here, the regular and executive MBA program and the Masters in Public Administration) that there may be some space for greater cross-pollination between these areas.

In consideration of these issues, the SPRC by a vote of 7-0 supports the Master of Public Health program.