

## **Executive Summary**

**Bridging the Gap: Aligning University and Community**

**Perceptions of Student Preparedness through Assessment**

**The 2014 MPH Program Assessment Summit-March 7, 2014**

**School of Community Health Sciences**

**University of Nevada, Las Vegas**

**October 15, 2014**

## **Background**

In the recent Council for Education of Public Health (CEPH) accreditation visit, the Master of Public Health (MPH) program received recommendations encouraging continuous improvement of the program's quality and advising to systematically assess student learning and competencies. The School of Community Health Sciences (SCHS) has done a much better job of closing the loop of connecting students, the MPH program, and community/employers. However, SCHS needed to take actions to further improve some areas, such as student competency assessment, identified by CEPH, that require more meaningful metrics and specific approaches to assess quality improvement.

Following this review and faculty discussions, two questions were developed as the impetus for organizing the MPH Assessment Summit. The two questions were:

1. How could faculty teaching in the MPH program better use student learning outcomes and competency assessment for program improvement?
2. How could we align the learning outcomes with needs of the public health community?

With these two questions in mind, we set up the overarching goals of the summit and designed them to strengthen the MPH program through the achievement of the following tasks:

- Designing and implementing a best practices model for engaging faculty, students, alumni, and employers in conversation about improving student learning and using the outcomes to better align the program and employer/community perspectives (and needs) on student preparation for the workforce
- Creating a set of questions for the program and employers/communities to address academic program quality and improvement

## **Pre-Summit Planning and Activities**

**Organization:** The Office of Academic Assessment (OAA) under the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs was invited to help organize the summit. A leadership team was formed, consisting of the Dean and Associate Dean of SCHS, the Director of the OAA, and Dr. Mary Guinan, Founding Dean of SCHS. We also formed the Summit Planning Committee (SPC), led by Dr. Guinan and composed of the SCHS Dean's Office, Chair of the Department of Environmental and Occupational Health (EOH), MPH Graduate Coordinator, Public Health Student Association officers and members, and several current doctoral and MPH students.

**Activities:** The planning started in Fall 2013 with leadership team meetings every other week. Dr. Guinan and the Associate Dean met every week to brainstorm ideas and details of the summit. The planning committee implemented action items identified by the leadership team and the SPC meetings. The following agenda items were discussed:

- **Attendance:** Key MPH program stakeholders were identified, including faculty, students, alumni, employers, and community members. Further, the MPH Advisory Committee was reorganized by including many new members who represent communities in the four emphasis areas of the MPH, plus MPH alumni and current students.

- What questions do we want attendees to answer?
  - What competencies do you think an MPH graduate should possess?
  - How would you measure them?
  - Please describe any educational experiences outside the classroom that you believe would contribute to student success, especially educational experiences that address the competencies.
  - What deficiencies do you currently see in our MPH degree program/graduates that should be addressed by our program?

## **Implementation**

- The summit was held on March 7, 2014. Total number attendants: 60, including 18 MPH Advisory Committee members, 16 faculty, 10 alumni, 15 current MPH students, and 15 community representatives from 11 organizations.
- Dean Shawn Gerstenberger hosted the main section and Dr. Dan Bubb, Director of Academic Assessment, delivered the keynote speech about academic assessment.
- Associate Dean Jay Shen, Dr. Mary Guinan, two department chairs, Drs. Michelle Chino and Chris Cochran facilitated the breakout sessions.
- The attendees were grouped by table to participate in the breakout sessions. Each table was composed by SCHS faculty, the MPH Advisory Board member, community representatives, MPH Alumni, and current MPH students. The SCHS faculty member was the table leader who reported to the general session after the breakout discussions.

**A summary of all the breakout session topics and transcribed notes of the discussion is provided as an attachment. A brief summary of each area is provided below.**

- First Breakout Session
  - The morning keynote speaker set the context for academic assessment and explained why it is important for the MPH program's success, and more broadly, why it is important to foster deeper relations with the public health community
  - Attendees gained a better understanding of what academic assessment is and why it is important for improving student learning and preparing graduates for the workplace
  - Two questions pertaining to assessment were discussed in this session
    1. What competencies do you think an MPH student should possess?
    2. How would you measure these competencies (aside from grades)?
  - Areas frequently identified based on answers to the two questions:
    - Knowledge of public health issues and policies (Question 1)
    - Statistical knowledge or knowledge of research methodology (Question 1)
    - Community-related metrics such as presentations to the community and conducting community needs assessments (Question 2)
    - Using rubrics to evaluate students' course work (Question 2)
- Second Breakout Session
  - The attendees applied general concepts and principles of assessment mentioned by Dr. Bubb, the keynote speaker, in the context of public health education accreditation

- that is shifting towards competency-based learning
- Attendees, including the MPH Advisory Committee members, community representatives, potential employers, internship preceptors, alumni, and current MPH students, express their expectations about MPH graduates and assess the current MPH curriculum in regard to the MPH competencies
- Questions being discussed in this session
  1. Please describe any educational experiences outside the classroom that you believe would contribute to student success, especially educational experiences that address the competencies you established in Session 1.
  2. What deficiencies do you currently see in our MPH degree program/graduates that should be addressed by our program?
- Top areas identified based on answers to the 1st question:
  - Internships, employment or volunteer work
  - Community involvement including service hours, networking, and assessments of community needs
  - Participation in real or mock conferences.
- Top areas identified based on answers to the 2nd question:
  - Lack of internships or community contacts
  - Need to increase students' statistical or research methods knowledge
  - Academic advising issues

### **Post-Summit Actions Being or To Be Taken**

Actions in response to the issues identified from the summit were delayed due to transitions in leadership; however, Dr. Shawn Gerstenberger was appointed as the Dean of the SCHS effective July 1, 2014. In order to achieve continuous quality improvement for the MPH program in a systematic way, the following actions that have been taken, or will be taken:

- Seek community input/feedback on a regular basis:
  - A face-to-face MPH Advisory Committee meeting will be held annually in the spring and other ways of communications, such as through emails, will be used on an as needed basis. Faculty and students will be invited to the Advisory Committee meeting.
  - The MPH summit will be held every other year in the spring.
  - Analyze data from internship preceptors' evaluations on an annual basis. (Currently, the data being collected are not systematically analyzed and summarized in order to provide feedback to the program.)
- Strengthen student governance
  - Increase the Public Health Student Association (PHSA) membership. Currently, the faculty advisor of the association is the MPH graduate coordinator.
  - PHSA will organize a job fair once a year in the fall. Potential employers and community representatives will be invited to be involved in organizing the job fair.
  - PHSA will organize a professional activity once a semester.
  - Invite the PHSA president to participate in one SCHS Executive Committee meeting once a semester to provide suggestions for improving the MPH program.

- Enhance MPH curriculum
  - Find creative ways to offer biostatistics and other methodology courses with low enrollments. The feedback from the breakout sessions indicated the MPH program need to provide more curriculum contents in biostatistics and methodologies. In fact, the program currently does have some of those courses available, but the courses do get cancelled due to the low enrollment. The university set up the minimum enrollment of eight students for graduate level courses.
  - Maintain and expand the current internship network to increase the number of internship opportunities and sites.
  - Make contact information of local public health and related organizations available to students.
- Improve academic assessment procedures
  - Continue submitting the annual MPH assessment report to the UNLV Office of Academic Assessment, which is a part of the university-wide assessment process.
  - Develop a check list sheet for the faculty chair of the MPH student's thesis or professional committee, indicating whether the student completes the MPH Exit Survey by the time of her/his final oral defense. The checklist requires signatures of student, the student's committee chair (faculty), and department chair before the student's thesis or professional paper final defense sheet will be signed by the committee chair. Alternatively, a dedicated day will be scheduled each semester to complete these assessments.
  - The EOH department chair or the MPH graduate coordinator arranges a faculty meeting to evaluate competencies of each of the MPH graduates at the end of each semester.
  - Competency assessment results of the MPH graduates' Exit Surveys will be analyzed annually and will be provided as a part of the annual MPH assessment report being submitted to the UNLV Office of Academic Assessment at the end of each academic year.
  - Maintain the database of current MPH students' information.
  - Create a database to track MPH alumni, especially their employment/career information.
- Increase and secure resources
  - Secure a tenure track faculty line in the area of environmental health.
  - Secure a tenure track faculty line in the area of epidemiology.
  - Secure a tenure track faculty line in the area of health care administration.
  - Replace the tenure track faculty line vacated due to the retirement of Dr. Mary Guinan.
  - Secure funding for hiring a full-time accreditation coordinator who will coordinate activities related to both MPH and MHA accreditations, as well as potential School of Public Health accreditation.
  - Complete a strategic space plan and submit requests to UNLV's space committee to address the severe work space shortage.

In conclusion, the first MPH Summit generated much needed feedback to improve the program, which has initiated some actions to address the identified issues already. More actions

will be lined up with the school's strategic plan to continuously improve the quality of the MPH program. SCHS aims to follow the direction of the UNLV Tier One initiative, adopt the continuous quality improvement philosophy, and focus on competency-based education model to strengthen our MPH program as well as other programs in the school. Ultimately, we want to be the first CEPH accredited School of Public Health in Nevada, as well as the first Commission on Accreditation Healthcare Management Education accredited MHA (Master of Health Care Administration) program. Currently, we are the only Association of University Programs in Health Administration certified undergraduate Health Administration Program in Nevada.