

PROPOSAL

Undergraduate Minor in Public Health

Rationale

The undergraduate minor in public health is intended to provide a broad exposure to the concepts of population health and the issues involved in assuring health, improving health, and protecting against threats to health. Public health is both a professional field and an area of inquiry open to investigation from many disciplinary viewpoints. The emphasis in the proposed undergraduate minor is on developing an awareness of the issues and the analytic approaches to understanding them. It can serve as a precursor to further study in public health, other health professions, or any fields in which the health of persons and populations is a relevant concern. In addition, public health is of interest for its own sake, as a component of a rigorous liberal arts education. The Institute of Medicine has recommended that, in addition to its importance to a wide range of professional fields, education in public health should be accessible to all undergraduates.¹ Although most public health education takes place at the graduate/professional level, the great majority of accredited schools of public health now have some offerings at the undergraduate level. Most have an undergraduate minor, and some either have an undergraduate major or a program for combining a master's degree in public health with an undergraduate degree in another field (e.g., in a "4+1" or "3+2" format).

Structure of the Minor

The Council on Education for Public Health (which accredits schools and programs in public health) has defined five core areas of knowledge basic to public health:

- biostatistics;
- epidemiology;
- environmental health sciences;
- behavioral sciences of health; and
- health administration.

The proposed minor is designed to give the student some coverage of all these areas, along with at least a bit of choice. The minor requires an introductory statistics course (which would also meet a GEC requirement) as a prerequisite, so that some of the content in the epidemiology course will be understandable. The survey course (400, Introduction to Public Health) will give the student a broad understanding of the scope of the field, both in its historical aspects and current practice. The other course required of all students is an introduction to epidemiology, which many would say is the fundamental science of public health. The student is then permitted to choose courses to represent two of the other three core public health areas, so that every student will have covered at least four of the five areas, in addition to the survey course. The final course is an elective, which could be in the remaining public health core area, but could also be drawn from courses related to population health offered in other departments.

¹ Kristine Gebbie, Linda Rosenstock, Lyla Hernandez, eds. *Who Will Keep the Public Healthy? Educating public health professionals for the 21st Century*. Washington DC: National Academies Press, 2003.

Requirements

The proposed minor in public health requires 20 hours of course work plus one prerequisite course in statistics of four or more hours. The courses may be taken in any order, except that the prerequisite statistics course must be taken before or concurrently with the epidemiology course. All courses in the minor are also available as electives to any interested undergraduate.

Prerequisite (minimum of 4 credit hours)

One introductory course in statistics (Statistics 135, 145, or equivalent) must be taken before or concurrent with the required course in epidemiology. No other prerequisites are required for the minor or for any of the included courses in public health. Elective courses taken in other departments may have prerequisites determined by those departments.

Required courses (16 credit hours)

PUB HLTH 400 Introduction to Public Health (4 hrs.)
PUBH-EPI 510 Introduction to Epidemiology (4 hrs.)

Any two of the following three courses (the other may be used as an elective):

PUBH-EHS 530 Current Issues in Environmental Health (4 hrs.)
PUBH-HBHP 520 The Role of Behavior in Public Health (4 hrs.)
HSMP 550 Health Care in America (4 hrs.)

Electives (minimum of 4 credit hours)

A minimum of 4 credit hours of approved electives:

- Electives may include any course in the School of Public Health available for undergraduate credit. At present the only such courses are in the area of public health preparedness, and are being taught on a pilot basis under temporary numbers. Additional courses will be developed as demand warrants.
- Courses from outside the School of Public Health that have a focus on analytic methods or issues related to population health may also be used as electives. Courses already approved for this purpose include:
 - ALLIED MED 665 Understanding the Aging Process (3 hrs)
 - GEOL SCI 203 Geology and the Environment (5 hrs)

(OTHER COURSES TO BE ADDED)

- Students or academic units may propose additional courses for inclusion in the minor. These will be reviewed by the Office of Academic Programs in the School of Public Health and approved as appropriate. Courses used as electives in the public health minor must not also be part of the student's major.

Implementation

Faculty Workload

Pending approval of the minor and the new courses incorporated in it, the minor will be fully implemented in 2006-2007. The instructor assignments for these courses have already been made

and are incorporated into the anticipated workload of the faculty. Capacity to deliver the minor on a consistent basis is assured because of continuing growth in faculty numbers in the School of Public Health.

Advising

The necessary advising tasks will be handled principally by the Office of Academic Programs in the School of Public Health. Because of the structure of the minor, relatively little academic advising is required, and most student needs can be met by staff members. Until the minor has been in place for some time, most academic or policy questions will be handled by the associate dean for academic affairs.

There are no conditions on entry into the minor. The Office of Academic Programs will provide a form to certify that the student has met the requirements of the minor (essentially that the elective hours chosen are approved, because the remainder of the minor is specified).

Enrollment

Our assumption is that the minor will begin with relatively modest enrollment (20-30), though some individual courses may have significantly more demand. For instance, the introduction to epidemiology is already being taught under a temporary number, and had an enrollment of approximately 120 in Winter 2006 because it is being required by the health sciences major in the School of Allied Medical Professions. In response to this situation, we have agreed to create two sections of the course in 2006-2007. We are prepared to expand enrollment opportunities in other courses if demand justifies such expansion.

Curriculum Oversight

The initial responsibility for the undergraduate minor curriculum will rest with the graduate studies committee in the School of Public Health, while staffing and budgetary issues will be the responsibility of the school's executive committee (composed of the dean, division chairs, and associate/assistant deans). At present, the instructors of three of the courses included in the minor are members of the graduate studies committee, so it seemed efficient not to create a new committee with similar membership. As the number of undergraduate offerings in the school grows and the associated workload expands, we expect to create an undergraduate curriculum committee.