

University of Alberta Quality Assurance Suite of Activities

School of Public Health: Academic Program Reviews and President's Visiting Committee

Excerpted Reports

Executive Summary

The review of graduate programs in the School of Public Health was undertaken in conjunction with the President's Visiting Committee. The Graduate Program Review provided positive feedback on the Master of Public Health, Master of Science and PhD programs including calibre of faculty, students and curricula. The committee provided specific feedback on areas for future development and guidance for the curriculum review and strategic planning process set to commence. The School of Public Health (the School) agreed with many of the recommendations and noted that several were already being implemented.

The President's Visiting Committee (PVC) found the School to be highly productive with a shared vision for engaged public health education and research. They commended the collaboration and multidisciplinary approaches tackled within the University and through national and international partnerships. They noted the community engagement mission of the School and its alignment with the University's goals set out in "For the Public Good". The PVC provided advice for planned changes to accreditation criteria, leadership and strategic planning.

Graduate Program Review

Programs Reviewed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Course- based Master of Public Health programs in applied biostatistics, environmental and occupational health, epidemiology, food safety, global health, health policy and management, and health promotion; ● Thesis-based Master of Science programs in clinical epidemiology, environmental health sciences, epidemiology, general public health, global health, health policy research, health promotion and socio-behavioral sciences, health technology assessment, and occupational health; and ● PhD programs in epidemiology, health promotion and socio-behavioral sciences, health services and policy research, and public health.
Review Dates	April 20-21, 2017

Reviewers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Dr. Heather Yeatman, (Chair,) Head, School of Health and Society, University of Wollongong● Dr. Ted Myers, Professor Emeritus, Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto● Dr. Pauline Paul, Associate Dean, Graduate Studies, Faculty of Nursing, University of Alberta● Dr. Joanne Profetto-McGrath, Vice-Dean, Faculty of Nursing, University of Alberta
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Outcome

The Graduate Program Review Committee (GPRC) found the programs to be strongly positioned, highly regarded and well established. Faculty and professional staff were observed to be committed to student success, productive in their research areas and engaged with community partners and professional bodies. The committee reported that students and alumni seemed enthusiastic and demonstrated success in obtaining competitive scholarships and grant funding. They noted employers reported being satisfied with their graduate student employees. The committee believes the School is contributing to the advancement of public health practice in the Alberta, nationally and internationally, and therefore plays an important role in the University's goals outlined in "For the Public Good", especially given the rising importance and challenges to the public's health.

Program Strengths

The GPRC made numerous commendations:

- The calibre of students was commended and the committee noted that they met with students who were very satisfied with their programs. GPRC observed excellent student achievements and emphasized the strength of graduate employment outcomes and alumni engagement.
- The committee was impressed with curricula and the learning environment and found them to be in line with accreditation standards. They noted the interdisciplinary focus of the programs.
- The performance of faculty members in research was noted, as was the close relationship between research, teaching and other activities.
- The committee recognized several of the strategic directions outlined in the self-study. They saw potential in undergraduate course offerings as a mechanism to support recruitment, especially of Indigenous students.

- The GPRC considered the School's recruitment of a Canada Research Chair in Aboriginal and Northern Health and plans to recruit students to work on Indigenous issues as a positive step in the context of Reconciliation.

Opportunities for Program Improvement and enhancement

The committee made several recommendations:

- The process for a new strategic plan should be commenced as soon as possible and an operational plan, reflecting the School's strategic plan, should be developed.
- Enrolment of Indigenous students should be made a priority and supported through different mechanisms. Strategic alliances with other faculties who have made progress toward Indigenous inclusiveness was suggested as a strategy.
- Enrolment management through strategic targeting was recommended; among other things, this could be supported through marketing actions, selection criteria and incentives.
- Student-centred approaches and procedures should be better articulated including communication with students and student advising.
- The range, number and sequencing of course offerings should be monitored considering resources available, efficiencies for faculty and students, and evolving public health challenges and requirements.
- Cross-faculty student initiatives at both the undergraduate and graduate level were recommended.
- More systematic engagement of alumni was recommended to support the achievement of course outcomes and student success.

Implementation Plan

In response, the Faculty made the following commitments:

- The School will complete the review and renewal of its educational programs over the 2017-2018 academic year. This will include a new MPH curriculum for implementation in the fall 2018 term and a review of degree specialization programs to continue to respond to the public-health workforce needs. An operational plan with goals and measurable objectives for academic and professional development training will also be developed for the reaccreditation process at the School.
- As a first step in the development of a new strategic plan for 2019-2024, the School will begin research planning in the summer of 2017.
- The School agreed with the need to expand activities to increase enrolment of Indigenous students and are working to integrate culturally appropriate topics in Indigenous health in curricula. Faculty and staff member resources have been devoted to the area of Indigenous engagement. Further, targeted recruitment activities more generally are planned.

- A student-centred approach will continue to be a focus of the school. Actions are underway to clarify responsibilities for staff and leadership to ensure positive relationships are maintained with students including communications and advising.
- The curriculum review process has already begun and moved beyond the core curricula to faculty resources, student interests and changing priorities in the field.
- The School already offers some courses to undergraduate students including introductory graduate courses. Work will continue in this area.

President's Visiting Committee

Review Dates	April 20-21, 2017
Reviewers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr. Donna J. Petersen, (Chair,) Dean, College of Public Health, University of South Florida • Dr. Charlyn Black, Associate Director, UBC School of Population and Public Health, University of British Columbia • Dr. John C. Spence, Vice Dean, Physical Education and Recreation, University of Alberta • Dr. Bill Connor, Office of the Provost Representative, University of Alberta

Outcome

The PVC found the School to be well-positioned to contribute to *For the Public Good* with its clear focus on recruiting and educating outstanding students; conducting high quality relevant research; and engaging communities. The PVC noted the success of the 2014-18 strategic plan and the objectives which have been achieved including stabilization of the School and accreditation. The School's faculty have earned various marks of distinction for their work and have strong records of obtaining funding. The PVC was impressed with the extensive array of international collaborations and the opportunities for student placements for education and research. The review found the School to be actively promoting engaged scholarship, making it well-positioned to serve as a lead model for the further exploration of this idea within the University.

Faculty Strengths

- The faculty of Public Health are a productive group, exhibiting a high level of curiosity and vitality in their research pursuits. They remain consistently strong in research funding.
- The Committee notes that the non-departmental structure is a strength encouraging

greater faculty participation in governance and supporting the multidisciplinary culture of the School.

- The PVC noted general satisfaction with the School's facilities and space which seems largely conducive to supporting faculty interaction as well as teaching and learning activities.
- The PVC commended the School for their success in developing partnerships (they note 1100 partners have been inventoried locally and globally). The Committee feels that partnerships act as pathways for recruitment and potential advancement opportunities. They also commended the School for its work to develop new frameworks for measuring and assessing the impact of this engagement.
- The School has limited but growing industry relationships, typical of a School of Public Health, and enjoys research partnerships with practice institutions and with colleagues across campus, exemplifying their commitment to multidisciplinary research.
- They note the strength of communications including the web-site, social media, and media relations to connect with the public, alumni and community partners. They were impressed by the "This is Public Health" campaign which helps promote awareness of public health and the School on the campus and in the community.
- The PVC found the PhD to be a strong example of a "practice-based" program both in terms of the subject areas being investigated and the research methods used. They note the curricular elements in these programs which promote professional development in such areas as leadership, communication and systems-thinking. Alumni spoke highly of the importance of these opportunities to their career development as public health professionals.

Opportunities for Program Improvement and enhancement

The committee made several recommendations:

- The committee encouraged the School to start a strategic planning process to identify areas of strength and areas to strengthen in the future. The future research agenda could align with "signature areas. The PVC also encouraged the School to continue to seek ways to measure community engagement and to compare outcomes with sister institutions.
- The PVC identified opportunities to simplify and clarify SPH's administrative structure which comply with the new CEPH criteria. They believe by clarifying areas of responsibility and allocating faculty time to critical areas, the functions and the roles and responsibilities of some faculty could be lightened.

- The Committee recommends that the School revisit the curricular streams (18 total) with the number of core faculty (35 total) in mind. They also recommend enrolment planning.
- In addition, they recommend that a single point of contact for students in the PhD and MSc programs be established for students seeking guidance or problem resolution.
- The PVC believes that Centers should be considered in the context of the research strategic agenda and their likely return on investment. In addition, the School currently has no endowed chairs or professorships. This should be a key goal of the new advancement officer and the School's leadership.
- The Committee found the gender balance among faculty to be good overall; but an imbalance exists at the full professor level which they note the School is well aware of. They note that all of the CRC's are male and that there is opportunity for diversification as several of these chairs are open right now.
- The PVC recommends working to create a more welcoming and nurturing environment for Postdoctoral Fellows including professional development. They suggested the School identify a lead resource for the fellows to support recruitment, orienting/onboarding fellows, and convening them periodically for networking, mutual support and collaboration.

Implementation Plan

In response, the Faculty made the following commitments:

- The School agreed that the time was right for strategic planning. The Associate Dean (Research) has initiated a process to develop a research strategy for SPH in the summer of 2017.
- As recommended, the School will develop measurable goals and outcome indicators for comparison with sister institutions in Canada. To accomplish this, the School will provide leadership for the establishment of a national database of agreed upon performance indicators for the network of schools and programs of public health in Canada.
- The School agrees that the adoption of the new CEPH criteria necessitates re-thinking of the MPH program structure. In 2017-2018, the Office of Educational Programs will undertake several initiatives to improve programs including better representing the primary and secondary specialization structure of our MPH degrees, and reinforcing the support system for research degree programs, especially regarding student supervision.
- The School considers the establishment of interdisciplinary research centres a key component of our research strategy and has initiated the internal university approval process for a Centre for Health System Improvement. SPH also anticipates the development of a Centre for Environment and Health.

- Faculty renewal has been underway over the past two years. Future recruitment will reflect the new research strategy and continue efforts to diversify.
- Although PVC was generally satisfied with facilities, the School has assessed the lab and faculty space occupied by the Environmental Health group to be at full capacity. The School intends to work with the VP Facilities in seeking a long term sustainable solution to this issue.
- The School agrees that an enrolment plan is necessary and will work to develop one.
- SPH agreed with the assessment of the experience of Post-Doctoral Fellows and will strive to improve the quality of their experience by developing a peer group for mutual support and a forum to discuss issues of common interests (such as job opportunities).