Annual Academic Assessment Report Cover Sheet

Assessment reports are due the 1st Wednesday after the Fall Term

Program Information:

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<th>Program Assessed</th>
<th>PHD in Public Health</th>
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<td>Department</td>
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<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>School of Community Health Sciences</td>
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<td>Shawn Gerstenberger</td>
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<td>Date Submitted</td>
<td>December 19, 2014</td>
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Contact Person for This Report

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Please attach a narrative (not to exceed 4 pages, excluding appendices) addressing the following:

- What are the student learning outcomes? Please provide a numbered list.
- Which learning outcomes were assessed?
- How were they assessed? (Programs must use at least one direct assessment of student learning.)
- Undergraduate programs should assess at least one University Undergraduate Learning Outcome (UULO) each year, which may or may not overlap with a program learning outcome.
- Graduate programs should assess at least one outcome related to one of the following graduate level requirements each year:
  - student engagement in research, scholarship, creative expression and/or appropriate high-level professional practice.
  - activities requiring originality, critical analysis and expertise.
  - the development of extensive knowledge in the field under study.
- What was learned from the assessment results?
- How did the program respond to what was learned?

Please limit the narrative portion of your report to no more than four pages. You may attach appendices with data, tables, charts, or other materials as needed. Please explain the relevant conclusions from any appendices in your narrative. Please contact the Office of Academic Assessment if you have questions or need assistance.
A. Student Learning Outcomes

The specific goal of the program is to train exceptional researchers and professionals who will advance the field of Public Health and meet the needs of the profession and society. To achieve this goal, the program will address the objectives stated below as outcomes. Upon completion of the PHD:

1. Graduates will display comprehensive understanding of major local, national, and global public health issues in their field of specialization.
2. Graduates will display excellence in applying the theoretical and problem solving aspects of public health in their specialty area.
3. Graduates will have conducted independent research that generates new knowledge, and is characterized by conceptual and methodological rigor.
4. Graduates will be able to communicate knowledge and research findings to appropriate professional, scientific, policy and lay audiences and demonstrate skills in translating research into practice or health policy.
5. Graduates will be prepared to pursue a lifetime of self-directed learning and professional development.
6. Graduate students will receive training in the ethical conduct of research.

B. Learning Outcomes Assessed

Three of the above learning outcomes were of particular interest with regard to assessment:

#1. Graduates will display comprehensive understanding of major local, national, and global public health issues in their field of specialization.
   Direct measures: comprehensive exam
   Indirect measures: student exit survey and the faculty final evaluation of each graduate

#3. Graduates will have conducted independent research that generates new knowledge, and is characterized by conceptual and methodological rigor.
   Direct measures: dissertation research – prospectus, manuscript, defense
   Indirect measures: faculty final evaluation of the student upon graduation.
#6 Graduate students will receive training in the ethical conduct of research.

Direct measure: required class in ethics
Indirect measure: preparation of IRB protocols

C. Lessons Learned and Program Response

1) Assessment of comprehensive understanding of major local, national, and global public health issues in their field of specialization.

Direct measures of assessment for this learning outcome primarily focus on the comprehensive exam. All doctoral students, upon completion of the required core classes, take the comprehensive exam. In the first few years of the program the comprehensive exam was a take home exam with one question for each of the 6 core classes. Although most students did very well on the exam, the PHD Graduate Coordinator and the PHD committee were concerned that the exam was more a reflection of how the students ability to conduct background research, rather than their understanding of major public health issues as they apply to their field of specialization.

In 2013 the exam was changed to an in-house exam. An integration question was also added to see if the student could effectively link each subfield to a specific public health issue of relevance to their specialization. We believe the exams now give us a more accurate understanding of student knowledge base and their readiness to focus on their independent research in their concentration area. The student exit survey and the faculty final evaluation of each graduate also include an assessment of their general base of public health knowledge and how well they are able to address core competencies in their subfield.

2) Graduates will have conducted independent research that generates new knowledge, and is characterized by conceptual and methodological rigor.

This learning outcome reflects graduate level requirements for high level, independent research that reflects an extensive knowledge of the field. This outcome is directly assessed by the scope and content of their dissertation prospectus, their final manuscript and their final oral defense. All PHD students are required to complete a methodologically rigorous research project that addresses a relevant public health problem and that demonstrates an ability to think conceptually and strategically, and to work independently. The program originally required students to pass an oral qualifying exam. This exam was supposed to demonstrate the student’s ability to conceptualize a methodologically rigorous plan for solving a specific public health problem, grounded in their area of specialization coursework. Many of the student’s, however, struggled to develop their prospectus despite their understanding of the problem and their ideas for research.
The requirement for the oral qualifying exam was replaced by a three-credit Prospectus class, carved out of the dissertation hours requirement. This class provides a forum for students who have passed the comprehensive exam to develop their prospectus in a group setting with guidance and feedback from the instructor and their peers. The instructor is the PHD Graduate Coordinator, someone who knows the students, their interests, and their needs. This class has been well received and is ensuring that students are building sufficient rigor into their research projects and conceptualized their ideas in a way that will generate new knowledge.

3) Graduate students will receive training in the ethical conduct of research.

The program originally did not have a specific strategy for training in research ethics other than the required CITI certification for the IRB. It became clear that there were gaps in student understanding, particularly when merging laboratory-based knowledge with community policy and practice.

All students are now required to take a class in ethics. Their knowledge is further assessed in their ability to prepare research protocols for the protection of human subjects (IRB). Ethical considerations are assessed more indirectly in questions asked by the student's committee at the prospectus and the final oral defense.