**AY20 Expedited Program Review- Public Health Practice MPH**
(Updated 2-5-2020)

**Submission date: <u>January 31, 2020 / February 6, 2020</u>**

**Program/s in this review: <u>Public Health Practice MPH</u>**

**Specialized accrediting agency (if applicable): <u>Council of Education for Public Health (CEPH)</u>**

**Campuses where the program is delivered: <u>Anchorage</u>**

**Members of the program review committee:**

- Dr. Nancy A. Nix, Division of Population Health Sciences Interim Director; Associate Professor of Public Health, Anchorage Campus
- Dr. Gabriel Garcia, MPH Program Coordinator, Associate Professor of Public Health, Anchorage Campus
- Dr. Elizabeth Hodges Snyder, Associate Professor of Public Health, Anchorage Campus

1. **Centrality of Program Mission and Supporting Role (696/700 words or less)**

Program Relevancy:
The mission of the UAA MPH Program is to promote equity, health, and well-being through excellence in the education of public health practice leaders, scientific investigation of public health issues, and community engagement in an organized effort to identify, assess, prevent, and mitigate community health challenges. The MPH is an exclusively ***distance-delivered***, graduate-level, multidisciplinary, professional degree with a concentration in public health *practice*. ***It is the <u>only</u> graduate public health degree program in Alaska.*** As detailed herein, the Program continues to fulfill its commitment to the UAA 2020 Values of student success, excellence, access, and affordability, the COH mission of "advancing the health and well-being of people and communities", and the Strategic Goals reported to the Alaska Governor and Legislature by the UA Board of Regents in the Compact Agreement Report FY20.

Support of Other Programs:
***The MPH Program consistently engages in collaborative efforts with other academic programs.*** Three core classes (HS A625 Biostatistics; HS A626 Epidemiology; HS A628 Program Evaluation) are cross-listed with other units. In 2015, the MPH Program and the School of Social Work responded to academic and professional demands to create the MPH/MSW degree as the first dual degree in the UA system. In 2019, the UAA MBA Program began recommending students take MPH Program courses as electives. The MPA Program and the MS in Dietetics and Nutrition Program require students to take select MPH core courses. Students in the UA Interdisciplinary programs enroll in MPH courses. MPH students routinely enroll in UA courses outside of the Program to meet elective requirements. MPH faculty serve on thesis and doctoral committees across UA programs. Opportunities to meet student demand and achieve efficiencies are continuously explored.

MPH faculty teach courses/workshops/guest lectures for other programs, which have included the WWAMI Medical School, UAA/UW MEDEX Northwest Physician Assistant Program, Psychology Department, School of Social Work, College of Health Interprofessional (COHI) courses, ANSEP, Della Keats, and Bachelor of Science in Health Sciences.

Outside Partnerships:
The explicit concentration of the MPH Program is **public health practice**.  All faculty teach community-engaged courses, engage in public health service, and conduct research with and/or provide expertise for a multitude of agencies, businesses, and organizations in response to partner needs. Additionally, all MPH students must complete a rigorous capstone practicum and project or thesis with a community partner (thus applying student competencies while meeting public health workforce needs).  **Faculty and student partnerships occur at the local, state, Tribal, national, and international levels, and include over 100 governmental agencies, nonprofits, research centers, school districts, and healthcare organizations.**  A complete list can be provided upon request.

Workforce Development (WFD) and Employment Opportunities:
A stated goal of the MPH Program is "To enhance public health practice through leadership, service and workforce development."  This is achieved in a variety of ways:
- Faculty membership on the Regional Network Steering Committee for the Northwest Center for Public Health Practice (NWCPHP) -- an organization providing data-driven WFD **training assessments and opportunities**.  Program faculty have assisted with assessments in the Pacific Northwest, including Tribal health settings, and routinely disseminate NWCPHP WFD resources.
- MPH Program sponsorship of the Alaska Public Health Association (ALPHA) and its annual Health Summit (with **continuing education units**).  Faculty have served as president, president elect, board members, and members.
- Examples of previous WFD programming: Program evaluation training by Dr. Richard Windsor, UAA Presidential Professor of Public Health and MPH faculty; Co-sponsorship/organization of the International Epidemiological Association (IEA) World Congress of Epidemiology (2014); Co-sponsorship/organization of the Association for the Study of Food and Society and the Agriculture, Food, and Human Values Society international conference (2019).

Program Extramural Support/Funding:
- Professional program fee (0.5 of base graduate tuition)
- Private donations from alumni and partners
- Federal, state, and organizational grants and contracts

High Demand Job Designation:
State of Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development 2016-2026 projections for job growth in Alaska identify **"Health Care and Social Assistance" as the fastest growing industry in Alaska** (21.4%, as compared to the next fastest at 13.1%).  The US Bureau of Labor Statistics projects public health job growth across the US.  **One hundred percent of UAA MPH Program students are employed within one year of graduation.**

2. **Program Demand (including service to other programs), Efficiency, and Productivity (7 year trend; 1337/1400 words or less)**

**2020 Program Review Data.**  In the section herein, the Institutional Research (IR) 2020 Program Review data are sequentially summarized, contextualized, and corrected as appropriate.

Seven Year Degree and/or Certificate Awards Trend:
The total number of degrees awarded Fall 2012-Summer 2019 (86), as calculated by IR, is correct.  However, **the IR reported distribution requires clarification**.  The Program does not operate on a cohort model (to better accommodate mid-career working professionals), and students must defend in the Fall or Spring

semesters (and any student that defends in late Spring will be considered a Summer graduate) -- thus, when awarded degrees are reported according to the MPH model, degree distribution is more even and reflects consistency in student matriculation.  It is important to note that a capstone *"project" option was added as an alternative to the "thesis" in 2014 to accelerate time to graduation*, and its success is evident in the degrees awarded counts.

| Semesters | Degrees Awarded |
|---|---|
| Summer 2019, Spring 2019, Fall 2018 | 12 |
| Summer 2018, Spring 2018, Fall 2017 | 13 |
| Summer 2017, Spring 2017, Fall 2016 | 9 |
| Summer 2016, Spring 2016, Fall 2015 | 14 |
| Summer 2015, Spring 2015, Fall 2014 | 14* |
| Summer 2014, Spring 2014, Fall 2013 | 16* |
| Summer 2013, Spring 2013, Fall 2012 | 8 |

*Year that Project option added to the Program

Credits/Semesters/Years Per Degree:
*The MPH Program requires a total of 42 credits*: 28 core course credits, 9 interdisciplinary emphasis elective credits, and 5 for practicum and project/thesis. The IR data indicate an **average of 36.3 credits/degree** (range: 33.1 to 37.5 credits/degree).  This is *due to the University policy allowing up to 9 credits from outside the institution to be applied to a graduate degree*.

As per University policy, Masters students are permitted seven years to complete their program of study -- and a portion of MPH Program students (most mid-career professionals) take advantage of this option (although it is not actively encouraged by Program faculty).  This is reflected in the Semesters/Degree (avg. 9.6) and Years/Degree data (avg. 5.7).  *The observed gradual uptick from 2017-2019 is likely attributable to a reduced faculty-to-student ratio (and thus, increased faculty demand for graduate committees) due to a series of faculty fellowships, sabbaticals, and pending retirement (without replacement), as well as reduced course offerings in response to administrative directives.*

Program Enrollment Trend:
*The IR data for program enrollment is incomplete, and the real numbers are significantly greater*.  Actual enrollment, as confirmed by the Program, is presented below.  Corrected numbers appropriately account for admitted MPH students who were taking courses outside the Program during the IR count and MPH students admitted in the semester following the IR count.  Also, of note: *Fall 2019/Spring 2020 enrollment jumped to 96 (bucking the overall enrollment decrease trend being experienced at UAA)*.

| Semester | Students Enrolled (#) |
|---|---|
| Fall 2019/Spring 2020 | 96 |
| Fall 2018/Spring 2019 | 86 |
| Fall 2017/Spring 2018 | 87 |
| Fall 2016/Spring 2017 | 88 |
| Fall 2015/Spring 2016 | 86 |
| Fall 2014/Spring 2015 | 91 |
| Fall 2013/Spring 2014 | 96 |
| Fall 2012/Spring 2013 | 99 |

***The discrepancy with the IR data appears to be due to a failure to appropriately count the MPH students enrolled in one credit for the capstone HS A698 Practicum-Project course.*** This course is 5 credits typically divided over multiple semesters (for example, over three semesters with a 1 credit, 2 credits, and 2 credits distribution).

Of note:  In 2011-2012, MPH Program enrollment increased to 120 students.  However, this was subsequently discouraged by the accrediting body (if additional faculty could not be added) and the Program returned to a target of 90-100 students.  This expectation by the accrediting body has been walked back in recent years.

Course Pass Rates:
The IR data on Course Pass Rates are not particularly enlightening as presented.  ***The average passing rate of 68.7% is a gross underestimate, due to the fact that the five required capstone credits (i.e., practicum-project or practicum-thesis) are distributed over multiple semesters*** (as is appropriate in the MPH Program), and students are awarded a DF (deferred) designation for these credits until graduation.

Internal Demand:
According to the Student Credit Hours and Enrollment calculations by IR, ***approximately 20% of students enrolling in MPH Program courses are not in the MPH Program***.  This proportion is likely a combination of prospective MPH students and students from other programs (which provides ***additional evidence of the MPH Program's support of other University programs***).

Student Credit Hour (SCH) Production Trend:
The SCH values reported by IR appear correct.  ***The trend of decreasing student credit hours over the past several years has been reversed***, and the average SCH for Fall 2019/Spring 2020 is 740.

Full Time Equivalent Student (FTES) Trend:
It is unclear how the FTES is calculated in the IR data table, and per Graduate School policy and MPH Program policy, 9 credit hours/semester is considered full time for graduate students.   Nevertheless, ***the apparent trend of decreasing FTES over the past several years may have been reversed***, as the FTES for Fall 2019/Spring 2020 calculated by the MPH Program is 41 (calculations available upon request).

Full Time Equivalent Faculty (FTEF):
FTE has increased over the past several years.  The MPH Program is comprised of 5 full-time faculty, but for the past several years there has been one faculty member (not always the same faculty member) on sabbatical or fellowship, and other faculty within the Division have assisted in meeting teaching needs.  As has been approved on workload agreements over the past seven years, each MPH Program faculty member typically teaches 6 graduate credits/semester, serves as academic advisor to 20-25 graduate students/semester, and serves as committee chair/member for 8-15 graduate students/semester.  Independent study mentorship is also common.

Enrollment/Full Time Equivalent Faculty (FTEF):
As noted previously, enrollment increased by over 10% in 2019/2020.  Thus, ***Enrollment/FTEF may have also increased.***

SCH/FTEF:
Over the past seven years, SCH/FTEF has decreased -- driven primarily by decreases in SCH.  However, as noted previously, ***SCH increased in 2019/2020 and the Program anticipates continued improvement***.

FTES/FTEF:
Again, due to the increase in FTES in 2019/2020, the MPH Program anticipates **the trend of decreasing FTES/FTEF has been reversed**.

Class Size (Average):
**The trend of decreasing class size over the past several years was immediately reversed upon instruction from the administration.** For Fall 2019/Spring 2020, the average class size is 12, with a max. of 23. Also, of note is that independent studies are not counted in class size calculations, and **the number of independent studies in the MPH Program each year ranges from three to eight**.

Cost/SCH:
**The IR calculations overestimate the overall cost of the MPH Program.** For example, following the COH Division of Population Health Sciences merger in 2018, two of the research faculty from a different program taught one course each in the MPH Program, but the IR data included 100% of their salary to the cost of the MPH Program as instructional cost in 2019. This **erroneously inflates Program cost**. Further, due to the retirement of a long-time faculty member, and the administrative decision not to replace her, **nearly $185,000 dollars in permanent salary savings was achieved in Fall 2019**.

Tuition Revenue/SCH:
**In calculations for Tuition Revenue, an additional 50% must be added**, as the MPH Program also charges a Professional Program Fee (equal to 0.5 base tuition). This revenue supports the distance delivered program, equipment (e.g., computers, software), supplies, and faculty salaries, as well as provides additional support for the Division and its multiple programs. **Even without consideration of the Professional Program Fee, the IR data indicate that Tuition Revenue per Student Credit Hour has steadily increased over the past seven years.**

External Demand:
No IR data are provided for External Demand. However, **the external demand for the MPH Program is high and well-documented**. As previously noted, 100% of UAA MPH graduates find employment; many accept positions of leadership in local and state agencies and organizations (list available upon request); and all faculty and students collaborate with community partners to meet public health needs in Alaska. The MPH Program is dedicated to **Public Health Practice**, i.e., directly meeting public health needs in our communities through research, evaluation, intervention, and service.

3.  **Program Quality, Improvement and Student Success (1464/1500 words or less)**

**Specialized Accreditation Process & Status.** The MPH Program is accredited by the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH). It received accreditation in 2009, was reaccredited in 2015, and its next reaccreditation will be in Fall 2023. Preparatory activities are underway and documented.

**Currency of the Curriculum**. CEPH introduced new accreditation requirements in 2016, and required implementation by Fall Semester 2018, to meet the evolving demands of the public health field. In response, the MPH Program **curriculum was updated** to include 12 foundational public health learning objectives, 22 public health core competencies, and 7 generalist public health track-specific competencies (the latter of which address Alaska-specific needs). These changes in the program curriculum have been approved by the University and CEPH.

**Innovative Program Design**. Established in 2005, the MPH Program was the **first distance delivered MPH program accredited by CEPH**. Work to innovate and evolve continues today: MPH Program faculty have

received **UAA Making Learning Visible Awards**, whereby they have developed and tested innovative course design to impact student learning and promote scholarship of teaching. Three MPH faculty have received **UAA Technology Fellows Awards** to learn and implement new and innovative technology in online classrooms to enhance student learning. Several MPH faculty have been involved in the **Community Engagement Fellowship** sponsored by the UAA Center for Community Engagement and Learning (CCEL), which led to increases in community-engaged research and teaching, and continues to promote faculty scholarship, enhance student learning, and address community needs. **Innovative works of MPH faculty have been highlighted in multiple professional settings**, e.g., NAFSA Association of International Educators Bi-Regional Conference (Nix, 2011), American Public Health Association's annual conference (Nix, Garcia, Hodges Snyder, 2013), the Alaska Evaluation Network Conference (Garcia, 2015), and CEPH's accreditation forum (Garcia, 2019).

**Availability**. The decision to establish the MPH Program as 100% distance delivered was for the express purpose of **making the degree available for Alaskans across the state**. Prior to Program creation, Alaskans with an interest in an MPH degree were limited to enrolling in an out-of-state residential program or a non-accredited online program. For **mid-career professionals** (i.e., the original primary target population), attending out of state likely meant putting a current career on hold and great financial burden. The UAA MPH Program made it possible for mid-career professionals throughout Alaska (and beyond) to obtain an MPH degree without disrupting their professional commitments or leaving their respective communities. The Program also serves an increasing proportion of **recently matriculated undergraduates**. The distance delivery model has proven to serve their needs as well. **To best accommodate variations in student availability, all MPH Program courses are offered via the Blackboard platform in an asynchronous format.**

Distance education can support increased engagement with diverse and traditionally underserved populations. **Organizations such as the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC) have championed the expansion of online programming**, as it can improve access to educational opportunities for Alaska Native students who reside in communities outside of urban hubs.

**Quality**. **Quality assurance and enhancement is achieved through multiple complementary mechanisms.** All Program faculty routinely attend workshops/trainings to improve online teaching (e.g., CAFE trainings, Academic Innovations, eLearning training, **Quality Matters** Program). At biannual Program faculty retreats, guest speakers and/or materials on best practices are standing agenda items. At the annual MPH Program Student Symposium, **students are surveyed** for feedback on Program administration, course offerings, and supports for student success. Additional assessment mechanisms include course IDEA surveys; and student surveys assessing attainment of Program learning objectives and competencies (completed by students mid-program, at program completion, and one year post-graduation). Collected data are analyzed in annual assessment reports and accreditation documentation, and **necessary Program improvements are identified during the biannual MPH Program faculty retreats**.

**Success in Achieving Program Student Learning Outcomes**. Throughout the past seven years, the MPH Program has been commended for its assessment procedures and processes for addressing student learning outcomes and needs, based on the annual University program review by the University leadership. Further, these reviews have **judged the MPH Program as being successful in meeting its student learning objectives (PSLOs)**. Note that in Fall 2018, the MPH Program implemented a revised set of PSLOs based on updated CEPH accreditation requirements, and the assessment of these PSLOs will be conducted in Fall 2020.

**Student Success**. Student success is defined not only by achievement of learning outcomes and competencies, employment, and student accomplishments, but is also supported through a series of Program Objectives that are a component of CEPH accreditation standards and **incorporate high impact practices (HIP) such as service**

***learning, capstone projects with community partners, ePortfolios, scholarly collaborations with faculty members, and writing intensive courses.***

Two of the MPH Program core courses (HS A605: Public Health & Society and HS A628: Program Evaluation) and some of its electives have ***service-learning*** components. These courses allow students to learn from and work with community partners to address identified needs.

All MPH students are required to complete a ***capstone project*** in their final year in the program, which requires them to apply program learning objectives and competencies, and to provide ***service*** to a community partner, as projects must be community-engaged and community-driven.

As of Fall 2018, all incoming students are required to develop an ***ePortfolio***. An ePortfolio allows MPH students to document the competencies they have acquired throughout their academic career, which can be shared with program accreditors, as well as the students' prospective employers (should they so choose).

***All MPH Program faculty incorporate students into their community-engaged research and/or projects whenever possible.*** Recent examples of this include, but are not limited to, the UAA Smoke and Tobacco Free Initiative (co-led by Dr. Gabe Garcia) and *GrowU* school gardening programming in Alaska public schools (led by Dr. Liz H. Snyder).

Strong professional writing skills are developed in ***writing-intensive core courses*** (i.e., the majority of our required courses), and further honed and applied during the capstone project/thesis. Further, many MPH students ***collaborate with faculty to deliver presentations*** at academic and community conferences and to develop ***peer-reviewed publications or texts based upon the capstone and/or faculty research/creative activity projects.***

Through the MPH Program's student success efforts, the program has ***exceeded the accrediting agency's student graduation rate standards every year for the past seven years***. Moreover, each year ***100% of all the MPH Program's graduates are employed***. In some of the cases, MPH students find employment with the community agencies or organizations with whom they partnered during their capstone. The success of the Program's students, however, is not limited to benefitting the students and the Program. Because of the students' work in community-engaged class assignments, research, and projects, ***hundreds of community partners -- in Alaska, other parts of the U.S., and internationally (e.g., Canada) -- have benefited greatly through the years***.

**Student Support**. ***All MPH students are assigned an MPH faculty academic advisor (FAA)***. Each FAA carries a load of approximately 20 students. Responsibilities of the FAAs are to assist students in defining their program of study; inform them of scholarship, professional development and employment opportunities; provide general career advising when needed; and assist in identifying community partners for their practicum and projects/theses. ***Once the MPH students transition into the capstone stage of the program, they establish their project/thesis committee***, which includes two MPH faculty (one of whom serves as the chair of the committee) and one member from the community partner. Each of the committee members provides support to the student throughout her/his practicum and project completion.

**Student Accomplishments**. MPH Program students frequently make ***scholarly contributions*** to the field and/or receive accolades during their time in the program. For example, many have presented their research/projects in local, state, national, and international conferences, including CCEL community engagement forums, the Alaska Public Health Association (ALPHA) Health Summit, the American Public Health

Association (APHA) Annual Meeting, and the International Congress of Circumpolar Health (ICCH). Others have received competitive ***fellowship/internship*** honors (e.g., the Graduate Education Diversity Internship offered by the American Evaluation Association, and LEND Fellows).

The MPH Program alumni, too, are very accomplished. Several of the MPH Program graduates have landed ***key leadership positions at the local, state, and national levels***, in agencies and organizations such as: the Anchorage Health Department, R.O.C.K Mat-Su, Southcentral Foundation, the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, the State of Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Some MPH Program graduates continue on to obtain their ***medical degree or PhD, take jobs as university professors, or join the United States Public Health Commissioned Corps***. The MPH Program also produces graduates that ***enter the pipeline for other UAA programs*** such as the MEDEX Northwest Physician Assistant Program and WWAMI Medical School.

### 4. Program Duplication / Distinctiveness (251/300 words or less)

There is no program duplication anywhere in the State of Alaska. ***It is the <u>only</u> graduate public health degree program in Alaska.*** It is ***distinctive*** on multiple levels. Based on Fall 2018/Spring 2019 IR data, ***39% of MPH students were in a minority status***, with 13% of all AN/AI students and 25% of all Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders in UAA graduate programs located in the MPH Program. The average age of MPH students was 34.7 years old. ***The broad range of students seeking an MPH degree include newly graduated undergraduates to seasoned professionals from a multitude of disciplines***, e.g., medicine, nursing, dentistry, veterinary medicine, law, military, public administration. Twenty-seven percent of students had out-of-state/out-of-country residence, 8% percent were active military, and 3% were veterans. The online MPH Program is an ***active military-friendly program***, accommodating those students during deployments. Another distinction is that ***all MPH faculty are highly qualified, tenured professors and all teach the core courses for the MPH degree***. When adjuncts are selected to teach emphasis courses, it is based on their subject matter expertise and public health experience. MPH faculty have diverse backgrounds in public health and other related disciplines, which strengthens the degree concentration of public health practice. Prior to academia, several MPH faculty held extensive careers in public health practice working at multiple levels: local, non-governmental organizations, state, federal and international. Additionally, the MPH Program Advisory Committee members are leaders of Alaskan health, social, economic, policy, and government organizations and two currently sit on the MPH Admissions Committee.

### 5. Summary Analysis (305/500 words or less)

***The goal of the Board of Regents is to double all health graduates by 2025.*** In support of this effort, ***the MPH Program has increased its enrollment by 10% in the past year*** and augmented mechanisms for shortening the time to graduation. Demand for the Program is strong, as evidenced by its enrollment and acceptance rates; and the potential to contribute to the doubling goal is great. ***The MPH Program has immediately responded to administrative directives to increase class size, program enrollment, and student credit hours.***

History shows that ***even as economies contract, the demand for health professionals persists and often grows***. Indeed, as noted previously, the demand for public health graduates is projected to grow in Alaska and across the nation. For example, the US Bureau for Labor Statistics projects a 5% increase in demand for epidemiologists, an 8% increase in demand for environmental health scientists, a 6% increase in demand for occupational health and safety specialists, an 11% increase in demand for health educators and community

health workers, and an 18% increase in demand for medical and health service managers.  For all of these positions, an MPH degree is required or increases the competitiveness of the applicant.

Finally, ***the evidence shows that the MPH Program provides an excellent return on investment (ROI) for both our graduates and the University***.  All UAA MPH graduates find jobs in their chosen field (many of which fill prominent health leadership roles in Alaska); and the Program has been ranked #8 in the list of 25 Best Affordable Masters in Public Health Online Degrees and #20 in the list of Top 20 Best Online Degree Programs. ***Even without consideration of the Professional Program Fee, the IR data indicate that Tuition Revenue per Student Credit Hour has steadily increased over the past seven years, while costs have remained steady.***