

Date: 28 February 2020

To: John Stalvey, Interim Provost

From: Nancy Nix, Committee Chair and Interim Director, Division of Population Health Sciences

Cc: Jeff Jessee, Dean of the College of Health and Vice Provost of Health Programs
Gabriel Garcia, Associate Professor of Public Health
Elizabeth Hodges Snyder, Associate Professor of Public Health

Re: AY20 Expedited Program Review: Optional Program Response to Dean's Recommendation

Program in this review: Public Health Practice MPH

Specialized accrediting agency: The Public Health Practice MPH is accredited by the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH).

Program response to dean's findings:

The Master of Public Health (MPH) Program faculty thank leadership for the opportunity to respond to the AY20 Expedited Program Review Findings, which were provided by the College of Health Dean on 2/24/20. We respectfully provide clarifying information about the MPH Program that the Dean may not have considered in his analysis, as well as correct a few errors in fact.

We look forward to continuing our ongoing efforts to increase return on investment, increase recruitment (which has always been a strength), and decrease time to graduation.

Centrality of Program Mission and Supporting Role:

1. In the first paragraph, last two sentences of the Dean's review, it stated: "*Market demand for program graduates is modest (most students are already employed and 100% are employed after graduation). Growth in most public health professions is expected to be under 10%.*"

Clarification: According to our follow-up meeting with the Dean and Associate Dean on 2/26/20, "market demand" is defined according to the State of Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development (DLWD). "Modest" is *not* an official descriptor, but "*moderate*" is -- and indicates 10-15% growth and 30-60 annual openings. This accurately describes the typical public health position in Alaska, with some positions having strong growth and robust demand. Nationally, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), growth across the range of public health professions is 5-18%, and faster than average. It is important to note that the MPH degree is broadly applicable to an expansive suite of professional opportunities across the private, governmental, health, and nonprofit sectors that may not be considered by the DLWD or BLS.

Clarification: While most MPH students are employed at the time of acceptance (which is true for the majority of UAA students), graduation with an MPH degree allows them to advance out of entry-level positions in unrelated fields to meet market demand.

Program Demand (including service to other programs), Efficiency, and Productivity:

2. In the second paragraph, the first sentence of the Dean's review, it states: "*The program has*

struggled with efficiency and productivity.”

Clarification: This statement would imply that over the years, leadership has expressed concerns about the MPH Program's efficiency and productivity, and that the Program has not responded. This has **not** been the case and there are **no** records of leadership expressing such concerns. In fact, the MPH Program has consistently been told it has been fulfilling the Program's mission and leadership's expectations.

If productivity and efficiency are solely based on the IR data provided, then they, unfortunately, do not give a complete and accurate picture of the MPH Program. To understand the unique context the MPH Program is operating under, a thorough review of the response the program provided in Item #2 in the Expedited Review is needed. The following are some of the program's accomplishments related to our understanding of productivity and efficiency:

- Despite the overall enrollment decrease experienced at UAA in recent years, MPH Program enrollment has steadily increased from 86 students in Fall 2015/Spring 2016 to 96 students in Fall 2019/Spring 2020. The MPH Program has maintained a student-to-faculty ratio considered to be acceptable based on CEPH's assessment in its last reaccreditation.
- The MPH Program has been responsive from leadership directives related to improving rates on Student Credit Hours (SCH), Full Time Equivalent Student (FTES), and class size. The trend of decreasing SCHs, FTES, and class size over the past several years have been reversed.
- In Fall 2019, nearly \$185,000 in permanent salary savings was achieved by the MPH Program. Moreover, Tuition Revenue per Student Credit Hour has steadily increased over the past seven years.

3. In the second paragraph of the Dean's review, the fourth sentence states, "While the program maintains a significant number of majors, most are part time."

In the second paragraph of the Dean's review, the fourth sentence states, "*While the program maintains a significant number of majors, most are part time.*"

Clarification: If "majors" refers to enrolled students, this is not unique to the MPH Program. Of the students at the UAA Anchorage campus, 59% are part time. In addition to this, the MPH Program was designed to serve working students, so part-time students were expected from the beginning of the Program and are considered the norm.

4. Also in the second paragraph, second sentence of the Dean's review it states, "*Despite imposing a professional program fee equal to 50% of resident tuition, instructional costs exceed revenues from tuition and fees by more than 30%. Recent changes in faculty have not substantially impacted the program's low return on investment for instruction.*"

Clarification: As explained in the MPH Program Review, the IR data **incorrectly** added into the MPH Program budget the full salary costs of two non-MPH program faculty who taught single courses in the MPH Program.

Additionally, revenue from the MPH Program had been used to support other programs in the department/division (e.g., business operations, travel, and recruitment) at the direction of previous leadership in the Dean's office.

It is important to note that the professional program fee was a requirement imposed as a condition of initiating the MPH Program, as a way to ensure the new program would not put undue pressure on state funds. This fee was approved at both the University and BOR level at the time the MPH Program was being proposed. This fee has helped the MPH Program to be sustainable, and at the same time, competitive in cost compared to other MPH programs in the nation. The UAA MPH Program has been ranked nationally as #19 in the list of 30 Most Affordable Master's in Public Health Online Degrees and #20 in the list of Best Online Degree Programs. Thus, evidence shows that the MPH Program provides an excellent return on investment for both its graduates and the University.

Program Quality, Improvement and Student Success:

5. In the third paragraph of the Dean's review, the third sentence states, *"Unfortunately, CEPH was not able to validate coverage of all curricular components from these new accreditation criteria."*

Clarification: The new CEPH accreditation criteria are expansive and significantly altered, and a multi-step transition was expected by CEPH and the UAA MPH Program. Indeed, **most** (66%) accredited schools of public health and public health programs also had issues of not being able to immediately validate that they were addressing the new CEPH Guidelines. Further, **most** (60%) of the new curricular components in the MPH Program **were validated** by CEPH upon initial review. The MPH Program continues to make appropriate progress, is complying with the accreditation agency, and is on track for reaccreditation.

6. In the third paragraph, second half, the findings state, *"The program regularly assesses its student learning outcomes, but Assessment Reports often lack detailed outcomes and recommendations [emphasis added]."*

Correction of Error: This is an **incorrect** assessment of the MPH Program's Assessment Reports. The MPH Program has **consistently** completed University-level reports, in addition to an annual 40-page program self-assessments for CEPH, with data analysis on student learning outcomes, a series of evaluation surveys, student feedback, community partner feedback, and student self-reflections, along with associated recommendations that are addressed at our biannual faculty retreats.

In 2017, i.e., the last year that the MPH Program utilized the CEPH self-assessment report for University reporting, the Dean stated that *"The program is clearly engaged in continuous improvement. It performed a thorough program assessment. It needs to more closely assess its program student learning outcomes.....The program should use the Annual Academic Assessment Report Narrative Template."*

The MPH Program was responsive to this feedback, and the 2018 evaluation from the Dean acknowledges this:

"In last year's Assessment Report, the program was encouraged to more closely assess its program student learning outcomes. More specifically, the program was encouraged to provide a detailed overview of the data and analysis. It was also encouraged to use the Annual Academic Assessment Report Template. I commend the program for providing a detailed Assessment Report. Significant curriculum and program changes were implemented to meet the new requirements from the Council on Education for Public Health. The revised program focuses on 12 foundational public

health knowledge learning objectives, 22 Master of Public Health program competencies, and seven public health practice generalist track-specific competencies. A new Assessment Plan was adopted by the faculty in November 2017.....The Public Health Practice MPH implemented a detailed and thorough assessment, despite being in the middle of a curriculum and program transition. I commend the program for implementing an effective assessment process. This provides a firm foundation to assess the recent changes to the curriculum and program. I encourage the program to maintain a strong focus on assessment. I thank the program for its renewed commitment to academic assessment and program improvement."

The 2019 evaluation acknowledges continued assessment of student learning outcomes, and reiterates the importance of focusing on CEPH reaccreditation requirements -- which the MPH Program has been doing and continues to do successfully.

The Master of Public Health (MPH) Program faculty appreciate this opportunity to respond and provide clarifications to the AY20 Expedited Program Review Findings from the College of Health Dean's Office. The intent of this response to the Dean's review is to provide a more accurate characterization of the MPH Program.