

**Department of Population Health
Master of Science in Health
External Program Review Response**

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The purpose of this document is to respond to the April 26, 2017 external program review prepared by Dr. Mary Harris at Colorado State University. Her recommendations for areas of improvement and challenges are followed by our response in bulleted points.

Funding

Funding to support graduate research consists largely of small grants (with one exception), even by senior faculty. A more rigorous funding base and more graduate assistantships will be necessary to maintain recruitment of quality students and support graduate research if the program is to grow as anticipated. This will require additional faculty to decrease teaching loads and free faculty time for research and scholarly activity.

- This item will be discussed at the next graduate faculty meeting. In addition, Dr. Keathley will work with Dean Hendrickson and the new COHS dean to address funding needs for the department. Dr. Fulton recently developed a working relationship with the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs concerning funding opportunities for graduate assistants.

Faculty

The base of 4/4 classes is high for 40-40-20 appointment. Although most faculty buy out to 3/3 teaching load, this still leaves little time for research. More robust start-up packages to attract high quality faculty who will participate in research and teaching at the graduate level should be considered. There is currently no mentoring program for non-tenured faculty and yearly progress toward tenure is limited to FES review (which is not the same). Annual review of progress toward tenure by the Department Tenure and Promotion committee and pairing each new junior faculty member with a senior level mentor is strongly suggested to enhance recruitment and retention of new faculty.

- Dr. Keathley will discuss with Dr. Hendrickson and Dr. Callaway changing the course load of graduate faculty from 4/4 to 3/3.
- Dr. Keathley is currently developing a department level mentoring program for junior faculty and will include annual review of progress toward tenure by the Department Tenure and Promotion committee.
- When the new dean of the College of Health Sciences is hired, Dr. Keathley will speak with Dean Hendrickson and the new dean about start-up funds for new faculty.
- When the schedule of classes for each semester is developed, we will provide faculty with more opportunities to teach graduate courses. Many of the graduate faculty expressed a desire to teach a graduate class.

Administration

Currently there is a lack of infrastructure to support programs. The graduate programs are in need of stable Department and College leadership. New hires are expected to fill these roles and hopefully will provide stability which has not been experienced in the past several years. The new leadership must be able to share (and lead) in the Department's vision. The Department has some policies in place to guide faculty decision making but these are not in writing.

- A new department head was recently hired who will be able to provide stable department leadership.
- Hiring a new dean for the COHS is in progress.
- In accordance with university policy, Dr. Fulton is currently updating and creating policies for departmental requirements for graduate students. For example, a policy is in the developmental stage for expectations of capstone course requirements and graduate internship presentations.

Mission and Vision

There is currently a lack of clear program vision and professional identity. One suggestion is to change the Department's name to Health Promotion which more closely reflects program strengths, future direction and faculty research activities.

- Developing a clear program vision and professional identity has been discussed in meetings with the graduate faculty and is currently under review. We plan to have a vision statement by the beginning of the fall semester of 2017.
- Changing the department's name to the Department of Health Promotion will be discussed with the entire faculty at the faculty meeting in August 2017 before the beginning of the fall semester.

Student Outcomes

The Department does not have SLOs which are measurable and achievable. If an accredited MPH program is to be developed, SLO's with ongoing data collection and evaluation of program effectiveness will be required. The most recent program evaluation was conducted in 2002. In order to assess program outcomes, strategies should be developed to maintain relationships with graduates. Some suggestions include: utilizing alumni for mentoring incoming students and involvement in pre-internship class; hosting networking opportunities for alumni and or development of a Department newsletter featuring graduates, program and faculty updates which could include alumni surveys.

- Department leadership (Dr. Keathley and Dr. Newman) will look at SLOs in terms of what is measurable and achievable and determine in what direction we should continue to go.
- This program review was the first conducted in fifteen years. An annual program review will be conducted by the program coordinator and reviewed by department leadership and the graduate faculty.
- The program coordinator will explore and develop ways of maintaining contact with graduates.
 - This will allow the program to utilize alumni for mentoring incoming students, involvement in the pre-internship class, and provide opportunities for internships.
 - A departmental newsletter is currently being developed and will feature students and alumni as well as program and faculty updates. The newsletter will be distributed to all MS in Health alumni.
 - The coordinator and current graduate students will begin to conduct field visits to alumni and interview them about preparedness for entry into the field. This will become part of the pre-internship class as a networking event.

Summary of Challenges and Opportunities

The Department has the ability to grow the graduate program to 20 – 40 students with new faculty hires. The Department goal is to obtain HCA accreditation and this seems obtainable, but the MPH is strongly suggested in order to increase visibility and credibility in the School of Osteopathic Medicine.

- The department leadership will explore the possibility of developing an MPH program when the new department head begins in the fall of 2017.

Some funding opportunities are in place. HEAF funding is available to support technology for research and for some laboratory setup but major funding needs to be developed to support graduate program expansion.

- Graduate faculty are encouraged to obtain external funding with the intent of hiring graduate assistants.

The missions of the program and the College and University are coming into alignment. Course content, objectives and descriptions are in the process of being rewritten to meet program goals. It will be difficult to bring the vision and mission into alignment until a clear vision for the MS program is identified. Some suggestions for curricular improvements include adding a communications class to the core, requiring statistics in both the thesis and non-thesis tracts, development of an epidemiology class and possibly a grant writing class. Other specific program areas which should be further developed have been mentioned by students. Reorganization of the research methods class to a face-to-face format is advisable to assist students with MS proposal writing. Additionally, all graduate students should receive ethics and IRB training and more practice reading and discussing research studies to develop a better

understanding of research design. Students reported unanimously that the drug addiction course was largely repetitive of the undergraduate course. A solution might be to upgrade to a course in Mental Health, Brain Chemistry and Addiction. Currently there is little multicultural health content in the curriculum. Since this is such an important area, either a course or greater emphasis in a number of courses should be considered.

- The HLTH 5360 Communication Theory Practice for the Health Professions will be required for all incoming students as it is now a core course.
- Both Statistics and Research Methods are now part of the core curriculum for all students - regardless of their track (thesis or non-thesis).
- Research methods will now be offered as a face-to-face class instead of an online course. In addition, IRB training and ethics training will be required in the research methods class along with a more in-depth discussion of research studies in order to develop a better understanding of research design.
- At this time, Dr. Nkansah-Amankra is developing a course in epidemiology for the MPH core and as an elective for the MS in Health.
- Dr. Scarborough is currently developing a course on grant-writing that will be offered as an elective.
- We will continue to offer Special Topics in Health bi-annually. The foundation for this course was set in the Spring 2017 semester.
- As an alternative to the drug addiction class, the Department will consider offering a class in mental health or brain chemistry and addiction. The Chair and Coordinator will discuss at the next graduate faculty meeting scheduled for the Fall 2017 semester.
- We plan to develop and teach a class in multicultural health or strongly embed in several courses. At this time, multicultural health is covered in the Health Communications class, Community Health, and Health Ecology. The graduate faculty will discuss this at their Fall 2017 meeting as to who will develop and teach this course.
- We will provide information regarding scholarship opportunities in the acceptance letters and send out scholarship updates as they become available.

The Department needs to develop a better method to track retention. The retention data in the University report are not in agreement with the Department's knowledge of graduate student retention and success rates. In this regard (although the depth of the problem remains uncertain) the Department may consider development of a mid-point evaluation to determine MS students' critical thinking skills and identify those at risk for failing to complete program.

- The MS in Health Coordinator will approach Mary Pascarella and Dean Hendrickson about developing a process to track student retention. The Coordinator keeps a folder on all graduate students in the department and when one is dismissed from the program, the folder is flagged. If the Coordinator could receive a list of all MS in Health students who registered for classes, this would make tracking student retention easier.
- We are developing a mid-point evaluation to determine MS students' critical thinking skills and identify those at risk for failing to complete the program. We will include this portion in the pre-internship class.

