Southern Connecticut State University
New Haven, Connecticut
Department of Public Health
Bachelor of Science in Public Health
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INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT
Southern Connecticut State University is an urban, four-year public institution, with 11,769 students (8,496 undergraduates) and 438 full-time faculty members. Its core values include excellence, access, diversity, student success, life-long learning and community involvement.

The University mission reads: “Southern Connecticut State University provides exemplary graduate and undergraduate education in the liberal arts and professional disciplines. As an intentionally diverse and comprehensive university, Southern is committed to academic excellence, access, social justice, and service for the public good.” This context is in perfect harmony with the mission of the public health BS program.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT
The BS in Public Health was licensed by the State of Connecticut to admit students at the beginning of the Fall, 1980, semester. Accreditation by the State was granted in May of 1982, when degrees were awarded to the first graduating class.

At the time the program was conceived, undergraduate education in public health was rare. Recognition by the program architects of two facts—that the vast majority of public health practitioners at the local level had no formal training in the discipline and that an urgent need existed to expand the workforce—represented an ethical responsibility to fill the gap. With its need confirmed by a formal assessment, the BS program was created from scratch.

PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION
The program resides in the Department of Public Health, in the School of Health and Human Services. When first conceived in 1975, its faculty belonged to the Department of School Health Education. In 1977, the Department became Health Sciences in anticipation of creation of the Public Health program. Later, school health education and public health were split into separate departments, and the Department of Public Health was born (1988).

The program has ongoing collaborative relationships with many public health agencies across the state through its internship program. Additionally, the Department co-sponsors programs with the Connecticut Department of Public Health (for example, the Environmental Health Training Program, through which all sanitarians in Connecticut are trained), and has research and service contracts with other agencies.
Presently, the Department offers cross-listed courses with the Women’s Studies Program and Anthropology Department.

Beginning with one public health faculty member in 1975, the Department has grown to 13 full-time professors. Faculty members have been selected to teach in the program according to areas of expertise in public health. With one exception, all tenure-track faculty members have graduate degrees in public health. To complement the discipline, departmental faculty members teach intensive writing courses and include...
critical thinking skills in the public health curriculum. The faculty eagerly participates in external and university-sponsored faculty development activities to refine and expand teaching skills — in fact several members have won the university’s prestigious Outstanding Teacher Award.

CURRICULUM
Program Mission
The mission of the Southern Connecticut State University Public Health Program is to promote its vision of “healthy people in healthy communities,” a vision that implies social justice and health equity, through:
1. teaching and learning that contribute to a diverse, competent public health workforce trained for entry positions in public health;
2. research that advances the science and practice of public health; and
3. service that promotes qualified, collective action to promote and protect the public’s health.

Program Objectives
Teaching and Learning
• B.S. students will demonstrate the capacity to contribute in entry positions to the essential services of public health.
• B.S. students will express confidence in their capacity to contribute in entry positions to the essential services of public health.
• B.S. students will express satisfaction with the Program.
• The Program will contribute to a competent and diverse public health workforce, at entry and advanced levels of practice.

Research
• Program faculty will conduct research and produce scholarly works that advance the mission of public health and the science and art of public health practice.
• B.S. students will have opportunities to perform research via the Honors Thesis program.

Service
• B.S. students will perform health-related internships.
• Program faculty will provide volunteer and paid, professional services to communities, agencies and/or professional organizations.
• The Program will advance the health of minority, disadvantaged and underserved populations in local communities and the State.
• The Program will promote the professional development of local and State public health practitioners.

A needs assessment was performed in the late 1970’s to establish program need. Since that time, the program has been re-assessed continually, its purpose refocused and its curriculum refined. Most recently, health education and environmental health specializations were merged into a single, more relevant health promotion specialization, which the Department believes better prepares public health practitioners. Current students, alumni, employers and an advisory council help the Department ensure best practices in training the public health workforce.

The program is based upon the Association of Schools of Public Health MPH Core Competency Model, and includes learning objectives for the five discipline-specific and seven cross-cutting competency areas. Objectives appropriate for baccalaureate studies were drawn from the complete set of learning outcomes. Then, the program’s required courses were developed around the learning objectives. Course learning objectives are generated by the Department’s Undergraduate Program Committee (with instructors’ input)
for every required course. Because the list of learning objectives is extensive, an example of objectives from one course, PCH 351 (Health in Society), is presented here (letters and numbers reference ASPH competencies, and course objectives are organized by area of competency):

**ASPH Competencies for PCH 351:**

**Diversity and Culture**
G.1. Describe the roles of, history, power, privilege and structural inequality in producing health disparities.
G.2. Explain how professional ethics and practices relate to equity and accountability in diverse community settings.
G.3. Explain why cultural competences alone cannot address health disparity.

**Epidemiology**
C.5. Comprehend basic ethical and legal principles pertaining to the collection, maintenance, use and dissemination of epidemiologic data.
C.9. Draw appropriate inferences from epidemiologic data.
C.10. Evaluate the strengths and limitations of epidemiological reports.

**Public Health Biology**
I.2. Describe how behavior alters human biology.

**Systems Thinking**
L.2. Identify unintended consequences produced by changes made to a public health system.
L.6. Explain how the contexts of gender, race, poverty, history, migration, and culture are important in the design of interventions within public health systems.
L.8. Analyze inter-relationships among systems that influence the quality of life of people in their communities.
L.9. Analyze the effects of political, social and economic policies on public health systems at the local, state, national and international levels.
L.10. Analyze the impact of global trends and interdependencies on public health related problems and systems.
L.11. Assess strengths and weakness of applying the systems approach to public health problems.

Reflected throughout the curriculum is the program’s emphasis on primary prevention. Required courses in the program total 48 credits, including a six-credit internship. These are:

- PCH 202 - Introduction to Public Health
- PCH 242 - Introduction to Epidemiology
- PCH 275 - Introduction to Health Promotion
- PCH 340 - Public Health Research
- PCH 345 - Health Promotion Interventions I
- PCH 346 - Health Promotion Interventions II
- PCH 351 - Health and Society
- PCH 358 - Health Policy
- PCH 359 - Environmental Health
- PCH 363 - Program Planning
- PCH 365 - Illness and Disease
- PCH 440 - Food Hygiene
- PCH 441 - Water Supply & Waste Treatment
- PCH 446 - Environmental Hazards
- PCH 497 - Public Health Internship (6 cr)

The six-credit internship is a required, experiential learning component, known for its rigor and organization. Over the course of a full semester, students complete 270 hours at a placement site and attend a two-hour, weekly seminar. Because internships are a bridge between the academic and practice worlds, students are expected to demonstrate competencies acquired in
the program, professional carriage and ethical behavior. Before they agree to accept interns, on-site preceptors are given extensive written materials to help them understand their role and the expected level of supervision, along with forms that must be completed, including the final evaluation report. Though new sites are added continually, many agencies are long-standing partners with the Department in the preparation of baccalaureate-level practitioners. Over the program’s long history, students have interned in a broad spectrum of agencies, including the Connecticut Department of Public Health, virtually every local health department and voluntary health agency in the state, community health centers, hospitals, college health offices, employee health programs and numerous community-based health agencies. The occasional student has interned with federal health agencies or abroad. The University is in the process of phasing in a new general education model, which requires a capstone course, and the program is revising its internship seminar to serve this purpose.

Majors are strongly encouraged to take electives in a variety of departments to complement the major. They also can choose from a rich selection of public health courses, many of which are taken by students in other majors, who elect to minor in Public Health or Wellness.

PCH 200 - Introduction to Nutrition  PCH 355 - Health Counseling
PCH 204 - Food Selection and Preparation  PCH 356 - Maternal and Child Health
PCH 205 - Principles of Meal Management  PCH 360 - Community Nutrition
PCH 250 - Occupational Safety and Health  PCH 362 - Public Health Management
PCH 270 - Stress Management  PCH 370 - EMT training
PCH 280 - Human Sexuality  PCH 425 - Nutrition Ecology
PCH 300 - Food Science  PCH 450 - Death, Dying and Bereavement
PCH 306 - Diet and Nutritional Therapy  PCH 480 - Health Law
PCH 349 - Men’s Health  PCH 481 - Current Health Problems
PCH 350 - Women’s Health  PCH 490 - Health Studies Abroad
PCH 352 - Health, Disease and Culture  PCH 492 - Health and the Aged
PCH 353 - Global Health

The Department believes strongly in the importance of thinking globally and in valuing cultural diversity. Accordingly, these areas of thought and inquiry and corresponding values permeate the curriculum. However, the program also offers its majors an international experience through the Department’s International Field Studies in Health program: Each summer, the Department conducts a two-week field course in Guatemala, where students study public health in its social, cultural, historical, political and economic contexts.

**STUDENTS**
The BS program has about 180 majors—most of whom are full-time students—and public health is a popular minor. Public Health majors are bright, enthusiastic about the field, creative and diligent. The program has a very strong minority representation of about 40%, including traditional minority groups and international students. To ensure competent practitioners are sent into the field, the Department has implemented academic standards that exceed those of the University. BS students must maintain a cumulative, overall GPA of 2.5/4.0, must achieve a grade of C or higher in every required public health course, are given only two attempts to achieve a C or higher in any course, and cannot fail to achieve a C or better on the first attempt in more than two courses. Over the years, the faculty has grown to keep pace with a steady increase in the student census. Every required course (and almost every elective course) is offered in both semesters (with several taught each summer). With two exceptions, multiple sections are listed for every course in both semesters. Sufficient resources reflect careful planning and strong Administration support for what has been deemed a distinctive program.
LESSONS LEARNED

Thirty-one years of offering the undergraduate public health major have presented a deep understanding of what makes a strong baccalaureate program. Lessons learned include:

- Students entering University seldom know about public health as a career option, and typically discover the program during or after the freshman year. It is, therefore, important for the Department of Public Health to actively expose incoming students to the major.
- Because the curricula for the undergraduate and graduate programs are based on five discipline-specific and seven cross-cutting competency areas identified by ASPH, it is vitally important—if at times challenging—to differentiate learning outcomes for corresponding courses and performance expectations for the B.S. and M.P.H. programs.
- It is important to group competencies appropriately and build courses learning objectives around those competencies. It is equally important to remain vigilant to ensure assigned objectives are being covered in the courses that embody them.
- So that every course will not be “introductory,” sequencing courses through prerequisites is necessary. Ensuring that courses build, one upon another, allows progressive skill development, integration of competencies and planned reinforcement of material.
- Development of an identity as a public health practitioner is supported by:
  - Mastery of public health competencies.
  - Development of values that support an ethical framework for practice.
  - Exposure to practitioners that serve as role models.
  - Instructors’ ability to illustrate course content with “stories” of personal experience.
  - Participation in practice experiences, through internships and pre-professional groups.
  - Membership and activity in professional associations.
- B.S. public health graduates serve the field in a variety of ways. Many become effective practitioners and leaders in the field; others migrate to alternative disciplines (e.g., nursing, medicine, school health education, social work), where, guided by a strong public health foundation, they introduce public health principles and thereby improve other fields while strengthening the field of public health. Therefore, it should not be considered a “failure” if a public health graduate does not enter mainstream public health practice.
- In today’s global village, an opportunity for an international experience energizes the entire student body; faculty and students who participate in study abroad bring the lessons back to the classroom, where everyone benefits.
- There is great value in listening to students’ input. Through many channels, including an anonymous, on-line “comment box,” students have provided wonderful ideas that have been adopted by the program.
- Southern’s BS program in public health has elevated the practice of public health in Connecticut, contributed to improving lives of community members across the state, and created rewarding career-path opportunities for two generations of students.

Advice to institutions interested in developing baccalaureate public health programs.

In addition to considering the lessons learned (above), keys to success include adopting a recognized set of professional competencies, and developing a strong curriculum around them; assembling a group of faculty that subscribes to ideals of cooperation and shared governance; avoid conceptualizing the baccalaureate program as being of lesser importance or value than the graduate program; resist building the BS program in the image of the MPH and treating undergraduates as graduate students; create awareness of the major among undergraduates.