Healthy People 2020 and Education For Health
Successful Practices in Undergraduate Public Health Programs

University of South Florida, College of Public Health
Tampa, Florida
Bachelor of Science in Public Health, General Public Health Minor, AS>BS Concentration in
Public Health, BS/MPH, and Certificate in Public Health
Program website: http://health.usf.edu/publichealth/undergrad/index.htm
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INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT
University of South Florida (USF) is an urban state university located in Tampa, Florida with an
enrollment of approximately 47,000 students. The USF College of Public Health (COPH) was established in
July 1984 with an initial enrollment of 100 graduate students. Current enrollment includes nearly 400
undergraduate students and 600 graduate students. More than 91 faculty provide education, research and
service impacting local, state, national and global public health.

Alternate delivery of degrees and certificates by web, executive format, weekend, and alternate
calendar options greatly expand student opportunities for educational advancement in the field of public
health. COPH is comprised of five departments: Health Policy and Management, Biostatistics and
Epidemiology, Community and Family Health, Environmental and Occupational Health and Global Health.
The mission of the College is to improve the public’s health through advancing discovery, learning, and
service. As the first Bachelor of Science in Public Health in Florida housed at a public university within an
accredited College of Public Health, this 120 semester credit hour degree draws incoming freshmen,
transfer students, and currently enrolled students wishing to change majors.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT
Prior to the inception of the General Public Health Minor (GPHM), a few undergraduate courses
were developed to provide teaching experience opportunities for doctoral students. These courses served
as general electives for undergraduate students and course management was handled within each
department.

In 2005, the General Public Health Minor (GPHM) was approved at the university level and the
Director of Academic and Student Affairs was hired (.50 FTE Administration and .50 FTE Associate
Professor). As course demand increased, new courses were developed both within the departments and at
the college level. Student credit hour funding for departmental undergraduate courses is returned to the
specific department and these funds remain in administration. All new courses are approved by the USF
Undergraduate Council.

One immediate issue that became apparent to the newly-appointed Director was the lack of course
standardization. Courses with multiple sections lacked standardized methods of instruction and student
assessment. Although a standard textbook was used in each section, instructors were teaching to their
strengths. In part this was due to time-constraints and a lack of sufficient knowledge about specific topics.
Although every instructor was using the same test bank, they were hand-selecting questions related to
their specific focus. In an effort to improve the quality and standards of the COPH undergraduate
education, the director met with all instructors to implement methods of standardization in multi-sections
courses without compromising their ability to creatively individualize their course delivery. It was also
suggested that guest speakers be invited to cover topics that were less known to the instructor. Last, the
course calendar of topics had to match across sections, so identical content was covered on each exam.
The exams were converted to an online format for each section, so the questions were randomly generated
for each student in each section from the same course test bank. A similar process was used to maintain standardization between course delivery, online and lecture-based courses, as well as courses from semester to semester. This technique increased the quality of the undergraduate courses as well as providing a course template for newly appointed doctoral students and adjunct instructors. Within a few years, it became apparent that the continual training of adjunct instructors was time-consuming for the Director; therefore a full-time instructor was hired to replace several adjuncts. Enrollment in the GPHM has grown from fewer than 50 students in fall 2005 to more than 450 by spring 2011. As each of the required course sections fill to capacity, more sections are added to meet student demand. Currently, there are approximately 2500 undergraduate students enrolled in public health courses in any given semester. After offering the GPHM for several years, the Dean and faculty decided in 2009 to begin the process of developing the Bachelor of Science in Public Health (BSPH).

PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

The purpose of the BSPH is three-fold: 1) to serve Florida by filling the critical need for public health workforce development; 2) to allow the GPHM students to transfer into the BSPH; and 3) to serve as a feeder program for the accelerated BS-to-MPH programs as well as the MPH and MSPH graduate degrees. The BSPH is housed in the Office of Academic and Student Affairs under the Dean. This decision was made because students earn a general degree with no specific concentrations within a department. Before the BSPH was approved by the Florida Board of Governors in February 2011, an undergraduate academic advisor was hired. Previously COPH granted only graduate degrees, so it was imperative to hire an experienced, undergraduate academic advisor. The person hired had five years of USF undergraduate advising experience and was able to establish databases, institute protocols, develop online forms, attend freshman and transfer student orientations, release student registration holds, advise and recruit students into the various undergraduate programs and certify GPHM and BSPH degrees for graduation.

Also two MPH-level instructors with teaching experience, as well as several adjunct instructors, were hired to teach the college level courses due to the growing demand for public health courses. Within six months, a PhD-level instructor was hired with his time split between the college courses and the Department of Environmental and Occupational Health undergraduate courses. Other departments note the value of hiring full-time instructors, so this trend is expanding throughout the college. As of June 2011, there were approximately 400 undergraduate students who have declared BSPH as their major. At this time, the faculty and staff are able to meet the demand for advising and course availability.

In addition to the GPHM and BSPH, there are undergraduate accelerated degrees, a Disaster Management certificate, research and service learning opportunities and faculty mentoring offered through collaborative efforts with other colleges on campus. First, the AS-to-BS degree offers students with an associate degree and several years of work experience to enroll in the Office of Undergraduate Studies Bachelor of General Studies with a concentration in public health. Second, after students complete 90 undergraduate credits, they are eligible to apply for admission into COPH through the available accelerated degree programs: a) the BS-to-MPH allows undergraduate Geography majors to enroll in the COPH Department of Environmental and Occupational Health; and b) the BS-to-MPH allows students in the USF Honors College to enroll in the MPH degree concentration of their choice. These accelerated degree programs allow students to apply 12 hours of graduate credits to their undergraduate electives thus saving them time and money. Third, the COPH Department of Global Health offers a Disaster Management undergraduate certificate. This new certificate was created for the Florida public health workforce interested in a post-baccalaureate education without enrolling in a graduate certificate or degree program. Fourth, COPH faculty research provides undergraduate student employment opportunities. Faculty
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leadership, advising and connection to the community provide mentoring for students seeking employment after their bachelor’s degree or admission into a graduate or professional program. Fifth, BSPH students are required to complete six credit hours of field seminar courses taught in the classroom and in the community. With faculty guidance, these seminars engage students in service-learning projects and community-based participatory research. Last, COPH faculty work collaboratively within USF Health (Colleges of Medicine, Nursing, Public Health, Physical Therapy, and Pharmacy) and across campus by serving on Honors College Thesis Committees, providing guest lectures, serving on Undergraduate and General Education Councils and co-advising undergraduate students seeking a double major or an accelerated MPH degree.

CURRICULUM
The BSPH is a generalist degree with no concentrations, tracks or specializations. This degree requires 120 semester credit hours. Although the BSPH does not have specific concentrations, each COPH department offers courses specific to their discipline. Therefore, students can select elective courses based on their specific interests. To date, the college offers 32 undergraduate courses by COPH or the departments; 66% of the courses are housed at the department level and 34% at the college level. Currently, 41% courses are offered only in the classroom, 34% are offered only online and 25% courses are offered both online and in the classroom each semester.

The BSPH follows the university requirements of lower level courses including English, math, fine arts, natural and social science, cultural diversity and humanities. Additional lower level course requirements are technical writing and introduction to ethics plus 18 credit hours of electives. There are five lower level electives available in public health: Contemporary Health Science; Careers in Public Health; Sex, Health and Decision Making; and Special Topics.

The remaining 60 credit hours of upper level courses consist of 33 hours of public health core course, 12 hours of public health electives, 6 hours of exit requirements and 9 hours of upper level electives. The core courses include Introduction to Public Health; Introduction to Environmental and Occupational Health; Introduction to Epidemiology; Biostatistics in Society; Health, Behavior and Society; Medical Terminology; Survey of Human Disease; Foundations of Global Health; Understanding U.S. Health Care; and Field Seminar (6 credit hours). The public health electives are Human Structure and Function; Stress, Health and College Life; Foundations of Maternal and Child Health; Foundations of Food Safety; Foundations of Public Heal Immunology; Women’s Health: A Public Health Perspective; Special Topics; Emerging Infectious Disease*; Public Health Emergencies in Large Populations*; Public and Private Continuity Planning for Emergencies*; Psychology of Fear and Mental Health Issues Related to Disasters*; Community Participation in Homeland Security*; Disaster by Design: Exercise Development* (* Disaster Management certificate courses). The Exit courses require one capstone course (Critical Issues in Public Health) and one writing intensive course (Foundation of Writing in Public Health). Lastly, 9 hours of upper level non-public health complete the BSPH requirements.

LESSONS LEARNED
Since the BSPH was approved in February 2011, several valuable lessons have been learned that can be applied to colleges considering the initiation of a BSPH degree. First, it was advantageous to begin the undergraduate program by first offering the GPHM because: a) the courses were developed slowly which allowed the faculty and administration to transition to undergraduate instruction; b) the undergraduate students became familiar with COPH which generated interest and momentum when the BSPH was approved; c) the university requirements for initiating a minor are less intense than for developing a new degree program; and d) the GPHM generated funding to build the infrastructure for the
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BSPH. Second, the creation of the half-time director position moved the workload from the department faculty to a centralized location in the college. Because the director was familiar with the department, college and university procedures, the transition from the GPHM to the BSPH was eased. Third, the transition toward hiring full-time MPH-level instructors proved beneficial in standardizing the courses and developing new courses, while assisting the director with further program development.

The major challenge encountered was securing a funding stream from main campus to COPH for the GPHM courses. Since COPH did not offer undergraduate degrees, there was a constant battle with receiving a correct portion of the student credit hour (SCH) funding each semester. Traditionally, the SCH for elective credits traces back to the college of the student’s major. Since COPH did not offer a major and the GPHM credits are considered to be electives, the funding was difficult to capture. Since the BSPH has been approved, the SCH funding stream is more transparent and somewhat easier to secure each semester.

The BSPH has grown exponentially in the first year. Overall, the COPH faculty are fully engaged and interested in exploring new ways to expand undergraduate opportunities. A few examples include: a) the creation of the Disaster Management Certificate by the Department of Global Health; b) the development of a new minor by Department of Environmental and Occupational Health for engineering and natural science students interested in the MPH Industrial Hygiene concentration; c) the Director was awarded a $30,000 grant that funded 1 graduate student and 14 undergraduate students to work in various divisions of the local health department; and d) two instructors developed a “Public Health: Live on Tour” intensive course that was offered over Spring Break 2011 in a five day, 8 hour format. This course used public transportation to tour public health facilities across the county including an organic farm, solid waste facility, jail kitchen and tattoo salon department of health inspection, biohazard disposal treatment site, and tuberculosis treatment center. The emergence of creative courses, research opportunities, and service-learning courses continue to thrive and develop throughout COPH. In addition, the Public Health Student Association (PHSA) has expanded into a comprehensive undergraduate and graduate student association utilizing social media through Facebook.

In summary, as institutions embark on developing an undergraduate program, the best advice would be to explore ways to implement a few basic courses while learning university, undergraduate policies prior to launching a minor. As student interest increases and basic courses reach capacity, the university will be primed to develop the minor. Finally, after a few successful years, the college will be ready to apply for a public health major. As with research, each step in the process requires more time and involves more challenges than previously anticipated. A slow and steady process saves time, increases buy-in and reduces errors thus resulting in the successful development of a public health major.