

School of Health Sciences & Education, Northampton Community College

Public Health, Associate in Applied Science

External Audit Report

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A program review for the Northampton Community College (NCC) School of Health Sciences and Education's Public Health Associate in Applied Science degree program was conducted in April 2022. This program review occurred by conducting virtual Zoom meetings, in-person meetings, a faculty and student survey was administered, exploring the NCC public health webpages, and materials such as course syllabi from the program were analyzed. A copy of the 2016-2021 Academic Program Review was also provided to the external reviewer.

The mission of the Northampton Community College's Public Health program as stated on the website is to "provide graduates with a solid foundation of knowledge and skills crucial to employment within the Public Health arena" (NCC, n.d). This program has recently changed based on prior student feedback to being an 100% online program that is meant to prepare students for a future career in the field of public health. The program is on an accelerated track format which allows students to complete the core eight public health courses in 16-months instead of the traditional 24-month period.

The curriculum of the Public Health program provides a wide range of fundamental knowledge and skills to prepare students for jobs in the Public Health field. The courses are aligned to help meet the program outcomes and the recommended course sequence is a logical choice to build upon the student's exposure to the field. Below is the sequence of courses:

- PUBH100: Introduction to Healthcare Careers
 - This was a syllabus that I was provided with to review. This course is not listed in the course sequence for the program on the website or in the Academic Program

Review. Something to double check if that course was removed from the program or if it should be on the course sequence.

- PUBH101: Introduction to Public Health
- PUBH102: Introduction to Epidemiology
- PUBH103: Social and Cultural Perspectives of Health
- PUBH201: Introduction to Global Health
- PUBH202: Public Health Across the Lifespan
- PUBH203: Public Health Education Communications
- PUBH204: Community Health Practice
- PUBH205: Public Health Field Experience

Each course (with the exception of PUBH205) is taught in a 7-week time frame, this limits the amount of content that can be taught in this short time frame. After reviewing the courses on the website, I would recommend that PUBH203 and PUBH 204 be completed prior to engaging in the PUBH 205 field experience. With all these courses in the same fourth semester this might be difficult as students are in PUBH 205 for the full semester. With course hours for internship now reduced. It might be helpful to spend the first 7-weeks of the courses planning the internship and completing some of the class paperwork assignments then during the second 7-weeks of the course complete the field experience hours. PUBH 205 public health field experience was recently changed to being a shortened number of internship hours from 150 to 75 and the number of credits changed from 5 to 3. However, the webpage still has it listed as 150 hours and as 5 credits. Just minor website up-dates to make when the change has been approved.

After examining the syllabus these courses seem to highlight the essential content and skills. They provide a broad scope of current and relevant information that reflect the field of public health. Reviewing all the course syllabus showed an excellent alignment of the student learning outcomes (SLO) with linking them to the topics covered in class and example assessments/activities for students to participate in. It might be helpful to identify the program learning outcomes (PLO) on the syllabus that are covered in each course. This would help to align the specific assessments that could be collected to show evidence of those outcomes being met. In the 2016-2021 Academic Program Review, Appendix D shows the Curriculum Matrix (p.22) with when content is being taught in select classes and Section V. Assessment in Table 4 shows that those outcomes are currently being assessed but doesn't identify what those assessments are that are being collected. I would recommend this be something to consider for the future to ensure the proper evidence is collected to show student growth and success in meeting those outcomes.

There are four faculty currently teaching in the Public Health program: Alyson Patascher, Michele Buzzelli, Samantha Beebe, and Robin Watson. I conducted one Zoom session with two of the faculty (Michele and Robin) and have talked with Alyson in person about the program. Along with the zoom and in-person meetings, I also administered a brief survey to faculty to collect additional information which had three responses. In the discussions and survey feedback with faculty they noted some strengths of the program as having smaller class sizes, which allows them to really get to know the students and form those personal connections. Another strength noted by faculty was the number of classes that are offered every semester for students to take.

Recommendations from faculty to improve the program, included recommending the courses be a full semester in order to dive deeper into topics. Someone discussed wanting classes to be in-person or synchronous to allow for more interaction. Another topic of discussion was the internship check list requirements and recommending that they be cut down to align with the less clinical public health student placements. An interesting comment from faculty, as a general recommendation was that they would like to meet more as a department to get to know the people teaching in the program to be able to talk as a group about the program courses and to share tips and insights.

The Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH), is the accrediting body for many public health programs, they have some different requirements for programs that are distance education (online). While this NCC Public Health program is not CEPH accredited I used that as a guide to collect some data to show faculty and student responses to being in the 100% online program. This led me to asking some questions in the meetings and survey regarding online student interactions (with peers and with faculty), program support, faculty confidence teaching online, and students' perceptions of their faculty being prepared to teach 100% online. Students responses varied in regards to positive interactions working with each other and faculty in the online classes, occurring all of the time (50%), the majority of the time (25%), and reported as sometimes occurring (25%). When asked about any need for professional development or training all faculty reported that NCC offered many opportunities to attend trainings for its faculty. When asked how confident the faculty felt teaching online 66.7% reported very confident and 33.3% reported being confident. All students reported that they felt their professors were adequately prepared to teach 100% online.

To encourage students to provide feedback about their program I offered three zoom sessions at various times throughout the day (one morning, one afternoon, and one evening session). I had one student who attended to provide feedback. I created a survey as well to try and encourage students to provide some feedback. With the help of Alyson Patascher, we were able to send it out to current and graduated students from the program. After a couple weeks and some friendly reminders sent to encourage participation, we were able to get four students to provide feedback. In terms of student responses, three were from current students and one response was from a graduate of the program.

What students liked best about the program included the availability and convenience of the program, that the curriculum covered a lot of different topics of interest to them, and the accelerated courses so that they could take two classes concurrently rather than simultaneously. One student specifically noted that they also liked the “thoughtful, engaged, responsive professors have made my experience through enjoyable”.

When asked about what Public Health courses they struggle with the most students reported PUBH102: Introduction to Epidemiology and PUBH 205 Public Health Field Experience. Students reported the field experience as a challenge due to finding placements on their own and the additional assignments throughout the course. The General Education Courses in the program that students struggle with the most included: BIOS 204 Human Anatomy and Physiology 1, MATH 150 Introductory Statistics, and BIOS 254 Human Anatomy and Physiology II. An interesting comment from students about these courses was the issue with finding 100% online options. Since the Public Health program is 100% online they assumed the other courses would be as well and that there aren’t enough virtual options available.

When asked about what students like least about the program they noted that the structure of the classes is broad and that there is limited application in the discussion and activities specifically to the public health field. They would like to see more of a connection in the class content to public health jobs that are possible with this degree. The issue with being in an 100% online program and having difficulty finding the general education classes online specifically they noted needing virtual labs. Another concern was regarding internships and not having specific locations identified to apply from and the extra fees for all the background checks for internship.

Overall it is this reviewer's opinion that this program is providing the students at Northampton Community College with the foundational knowledge and skills to work in the field of public health. Changes have already been made to make this program based on student feedback which the students seemed to appreciate it. There was some disconnect between what faculty wanted vs. students. Having a department meeting every so often so everyone is aware of what's going on could be beneficial.

There are a few program suggestions that I think could help make this program shine. First, after many questions we were not able to determine where these Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) came from. I would recommend looking at one of the national accreditation programs for Public Health to align content in your program. This would only strengthen your program to ensure the students are being prepared to work in the field of public health. Such programs as the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH) or maybe the National Commission for Health Education Credentialing (NCHEC). A student comment that I think stands out and would be a recommendation to faculty would be to ensure that no matter what class

you are teaching that they are able to connect what's being discussed in class specifically to public health and to connect it to future jobs in the field of public health. I would also recommend identifying the PLOs in the course's syllabus and work with faculty to ensure the assessments being done to meet the PLOs align properly and that information can be collected to show students success meeting the PLOs. I would recommend double checking if PUBH 100: Introduction to Healthcare Careers was a removed course or if it is missing from the course sequence. The Website also needs a few updates with the new PUBH205 changes to credits and hours of internship that need to be completed.

In conclusion, it was my pleasure to assist with this programs evaluation and to serve as the External Reviewer for the Public Health A.A.S. program at Northampton Community College. Please contact me should you have any questions or concerns or need any additional feedback regarding this summery report.

Sincerely,

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References

Northampton Community College (NCC). (n.d.). *Public Health, Associate in Applied Science*.

<https://northampton.smartcatalogiq.com/2021-2022/College-Catalog/Academic-Programs/Health-Sciences/Public-Health-Associate-in-Applied-Science>