

UNIVERSITY SENATE

UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Introduced by: UAC

Date: May 10, 2010

Proposal to Suspend Minor in Public Health

IT IS HEREBY PROPOSED THAT THE FOLLOWING BE ADOPTED:

1. That the suspension of the minor in Public Health be approved by the University Senate
2. That this proposal be forwarded to President George M. Philip for approval.
3. That the proposal take effect upon the President's approval.

Background

In the Fall of 2006, the SPH received University approval to create a 18-credit undergraduate minor in Public Health. The driving force for the minor was to allow students to complement their core major with knowledge about public health. It was anticipated that students interested in medicine, allied health professions, law, public policy, political science and other social sciences would be attracted to the interdisciplinary and population-based philosophy of public health. Additionally, a minor in public health would prepare students to consider careers in public health and serve as a conduit for those seeking admission to the SPH's graduate program.

Currently, there are 70 students with declared minors in public health. The expanded interest in public health is commendable. Prior to 9/11, nine out of ten Americans viewed public health as, 'health care for the poor.' However, since then several national and local events have better informed the public of the meaning of 'public' in public health and the importance of this discipline in our daily lives. The anthrax scare, Hurricane Katrina, last winter's Capital District ice storm, and more recently the H1N1 pandemic have stimulated interest in public health and the potential for more students seeking to study public health as undergraduates.

To provide interested undergraduates with more extensive education in public health, in April 2007, the SPH completed a proposal to establish a 36-credit undergraduate major, and we have been admitting students to that program since the 2007-08 academic year. We have a goal of admitting 20 new students to the major each year up to a total enrollment of 60, controlling the numbers through an application process. Currently, there are 16 undergraduate majors. For students seeking to major in public health, there are defined admissions and advisement processes. Students follow a Major Academic Pathway (M.A.P.) which defines the route for completing the required coursework within four years. All declared majors are assigned a SPH faculty advisor to manage their academic progress, provide advisement and assist in selecting appropriate electives.

Challenges

As the number of students interested in studying public health has increased, our cohort of minors has grown to 70 students, with no mechanism for limiting future growth in the program. The SPH is challenged to manage this growing population. When we created the undergraduate public health program, we were told that the only way to limit the number of minors was by limits on the number of seats in required courses. Other mechanisms are now available, but total capacity would still be an issue. The more minors we accept, the fewer majors we would have room for and vice versa. Additionally, it would create added work for the faculty and the program administrator, who do not have time to review both major and minor applications.

In contrast to the major, students seeking to minor in public health follow a less defined and supervised path. They simply declare that their minor is public health, and then enroll in the required courses. There is no coordination with the Undergraduate Public Health Program Director or Coordinator. The unintended consequence of this has been an undesirable competition between undergraduate majors and minors for a limited number of seats and course sections and significant dissatisfaction on the part of minors when they find themselves unable to register for required courses. We do not have the capacity to add more sections of required courses, with our small faculty and graduate teaching loads required to maintain the school's accreditation. Due to budget cuts, the School of Public Health has only received half of the faculty lines requested through the Compact Plan to support the new public health major, and the dean's promised "dowry lines" have been eliminated.

Proposal

Despite these constraints, the School is committed to continuing to offer high quality undergraduate education in public health. Taken together, the changes proposed below will provide educational opportunities in public health to a growing number of UAlbany undergraduates, while expanding the undergraduate public health major, and enhancing the academic profile of students seeking graduate degrees in public health or preparing for careers in the field.

Public Health Minor

The SPH seeks approval to phase out and discontinue the public health minor. Those students currently enrolled as minors will be allowed to complete their course of study. Students who have completed three or more courses toward the minor in Public Health (including classes they are currently enrolled in), but have not declared their minor, will be allowed to enroll in the PH Minor. Students earlier in the process will not be able to become PH Minors.

Large General Education Courses

To ensure that a large number of undergraduate students continue to have access to basic education in public health, we propose increasing the class sizes for the Introduction to Public Health and Introduction to Epidemiology courses and developing a large, new Introduction to Global Health course. Each of these courses will accommodate 100 – 200 students per class and will meet general education requirements. With the new availability of these three large courses, virtually any student who is interested in public health would have the ability to get a solid introduction to the field. The Association of American Colleges and Universities and the Association for Prevention Teaching and Research are encouraging all colleges and universities around the country to offer at least those three courses to give their students an introduction to key public health issues – a mini-minor, if you will. A copy of their 2008 joint report is attached for reference. It includes a general outline for an undergraduate Global Health course. Carol Whittaker will use this outline in developing the full syllabus for our course this summer. We will get a draft outline to UAC as soon as possible.

Public Health Major

Phasing out the public health minor will enable us to strengthen the public health major, which has not achieved the numbers of students we projected in our initial plans for the undergraduate program. Our goal is to have 20 majors in each class year, and we believe that growth of the major will largely happen naturally: students will opt to join the major when the minor is no longer available to them. In addition, we are enhancing the major by developing an honors track to make the public health major more appealing to students. We will continue to meet regularly with pre-major advising staff, the Honors College, and relevant student groups to encourage interested students to apply to the PH major (regular and honors tracks). We will also have an open house each semester to promote and recruit students interested in pursuing a major in public health. Upon graduation, the public health majors will be excellent candidates for admission into our M.P.H. program. We are exploring the possibility of giving exceptionally well-qualified majors advanced standing in the MPH program, making them eligible for internship opportunities after completion of their first semester.

Together, the expansion of general education seats in public health courses and the enhancements to the public health major will strengthen the educational opportunities available for students who are interested in studying public health as undergraduates at the University at Albany.

Proposal for Undergraduate Introduction to Global Health Course

Course Overview: Global health is the study of the biological, social, economic, and environmental contributors to health and disease in populations throughout the world. This course will focus on health inequities and the socioeconomic context of disease; the health status of special populations; the impact of infectious and chronic diseases in developing countries; and the health effects of environmental change.

Learning Objectives: By completion of this course, students will be able to

- Identify common causes of morbidity and mortality by world region.
- Describe the various causes of disease (e.g., infectious, nutritional, or genetic).
- Explain the socioeconomic factors that contribute to health inequities.
- Identify the health needs of special population groups like women and children.
- Explain the differences between various types of infectious agents and how they are transmitted.
- Identify infectious diseases of global importance including HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis and describe their modes of transmission, symptoms, methods for prevention, and other characteristics.
- Identify components of a healthy diet and explain the effects of poor nutrition.
- Explain how water, sanitation, air quality and other aspects of environmental health relate to human health.
- Explain how environmental changes impact human health and cite examples of communities that have worked together to create healthier environments.
- Locate and use published global health reports.
- Identify major organizations that are involved in global health.
- Propose important global health priorities and formulate a plan to address them.

Syllabus for 14 Week Term (1 Class per Week):

Week 1: Introduction to Global Health
Week 2: Health Inequities
Week 3: Socioeconomic Context of Disease
Week 4: Maternal and Child Health
Week 5: Health of Special Populations
Week 6: Infectious Diseases
Week 7: HIV/AIDS, Malaria, and Tuberculosis (TB)
Week 8: Globalization and Emerging Infectious Diseases
Week 9: Nutrition
Week 10: Environmental Health
Week 11: Health Effects of Environmental Change
Week 12: Global Health Organizations and Funders
Week 13: Global Health Priorities
Week 14: Final Exam