

Quality Assurance in Undergraduate Public Health
"A Meeting of Thought Leaders"
February 6, 2011

On February 6, 2011, the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH) brought together a group of public health and educational leaders to discuss quality issues related to bachelors degrees in public health. The group was tasked with providing recommendations to the Council about how to proceed with quality assurance in baccalaureate public health degree programs, particularly those developing without the benefit of affiliation with an accredited school or graduate program in public health.

This meeting followed an organizational comment period held in early-spring 2010 during which the Council received support for developing a mechanism for quality assurance in undergraduate public health education and training. Comments also emphasized the importance of consultation with affected parties in the development of any system. This meeting was one of the first steps. Members of the group were selected not only for their individual expertise, but also to ensure that varying perspectives from government and private public health organizations, potential employers, and academic institutions were represented.

The group arrived at the following consensus statements:

1. Given the rapid growth in undergraduate public health in all types of higher education institutions, accreditation might be necessary to assure quality in baccalaureate-level public health majors.
2. Accreditation is an iterative, collaborative process that takes time and must involve key stakeholder groups.
3. Principles of quality should apply to all baccalaureate-level public health majors, whether in schools of public health, affiliated with graduate public health programs, or in colleges or universities without graduate-level public health training.

The group participated in a brainstorming and prioritization exercise in which they identified core public health content, service learning, and personal and social responsibility among the most important areas of curricular concern. In addition, they identified an organizational framework that included practitioners as teachers, advising and mentoring students, authentic student evaluation, and recruitment and retention of students, particularly those from underrepresented groups, as important considerations in any quality assurance system. Further, they agreed that development of criteria for baccalaureate degrees should be informed by ongoing initiatives such as the current collaborative effort, convened by the Association of Schools of Public Health, to identify competencies for baccalaureate degree majors and the recent Lumina Foundation report on degree articulation.

The group also discussed, in general, activities that must be undertaken for CEPH to build capacity to engage in the accreditation of baccalaureate degree majors which are not affiliated with accredited graduate schools and programs. These would include assuring an organizational structure that would engage sufficient expertise to appropriately evaluate each degree level, making degree level differences transparent to the public, and exploration of resource needs. Based on the current state of organizational readiness and stage of curricular definition initiatives, an accreditation program for baccalaureate degree majors would likely take three to five years to become operational.

The Council intends to consider recommendations of this group, continue discussions with affiliated organizations, continue to seek feedback and provide updates as plans materialize in the coming year and beyond.

Meeting Participants

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