

ABSTRACT: 2015 ELAM Institutional Action Project Poster Symposium

Project Title: Transforming an MPH Program to be Fully Competency-Based

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Background, Challenge or Opportunity: The move toward competency-based education has been more recent in public health as compared to other health professions. Although accreditation requires a competency-based curriculum, there is no mandated set of competencies that schools of public health must address, nor is there a standard method of competency assessment, and many schools struggle with fully implementing a competency-based curriculum. A recent re-accreditation self-study highlighted our school's need to enhance our competency-based approach. This need, coupled with a current national effort to redefine public health education by focusing on the essential skills needed by the next generation of public health professionals, presents a timely opportunity for a school-wide initiative focused on fully integrating a competency-based approach into our MPH curriculum.

Purpose/Objectives: The purpose of this project is to develop and institutionalize an integrated competency-based approach within our MPH program. Objectives include (1) the adoption, by faculty, of a competency-based framework in curriculum and course design, (2) the revision of current degree competencies into a smaller, more manageable set, and (3) the establishment of a systematic approach of assessing competency attainment among MPH students.

Methods/Approach: An initial needs assessment has included an analysis of the historical development of our current competency-based approach and a comparison to accreditation standards, a review of relevant literature, and an assessment of competency-based approaches at other schools of public health and within other health professions disciplines. This will be followed by faculty and student surveys to assess knowledge and awareness of competency-based education, as well as current levels of engagement with competencies. Implementation will begin with a school wide educational workshop for faculty. Working groups will be formed to revise existing competencies into a smaller, more refined set, and the process will be informed by stakeholder input. One MPH concentration will serve as a pilot for developing a system of competency assessment. Using the results of this pilot project as a model, each MPH concentration will be assisted in the development of similar competency assessment systems.

Outcomes and Evaluation Strategy: Outcomes will include the development of a streamlined set of measurable competencies, explicit competency-curriculum linkages, and a plan for the systematic assessment of student attainment of competencies. A pre-post evaluation strategy will be used to document changes over time in knowledge and awareness of competencies and engagement with competencies among both students and faculty. Additional evaluation outcomes will include the extent of competency attainment among students upon graduation, and assessment by employers of our graduates' competency attainment.

Transforming an MPH Program to be Fully Competency-Based



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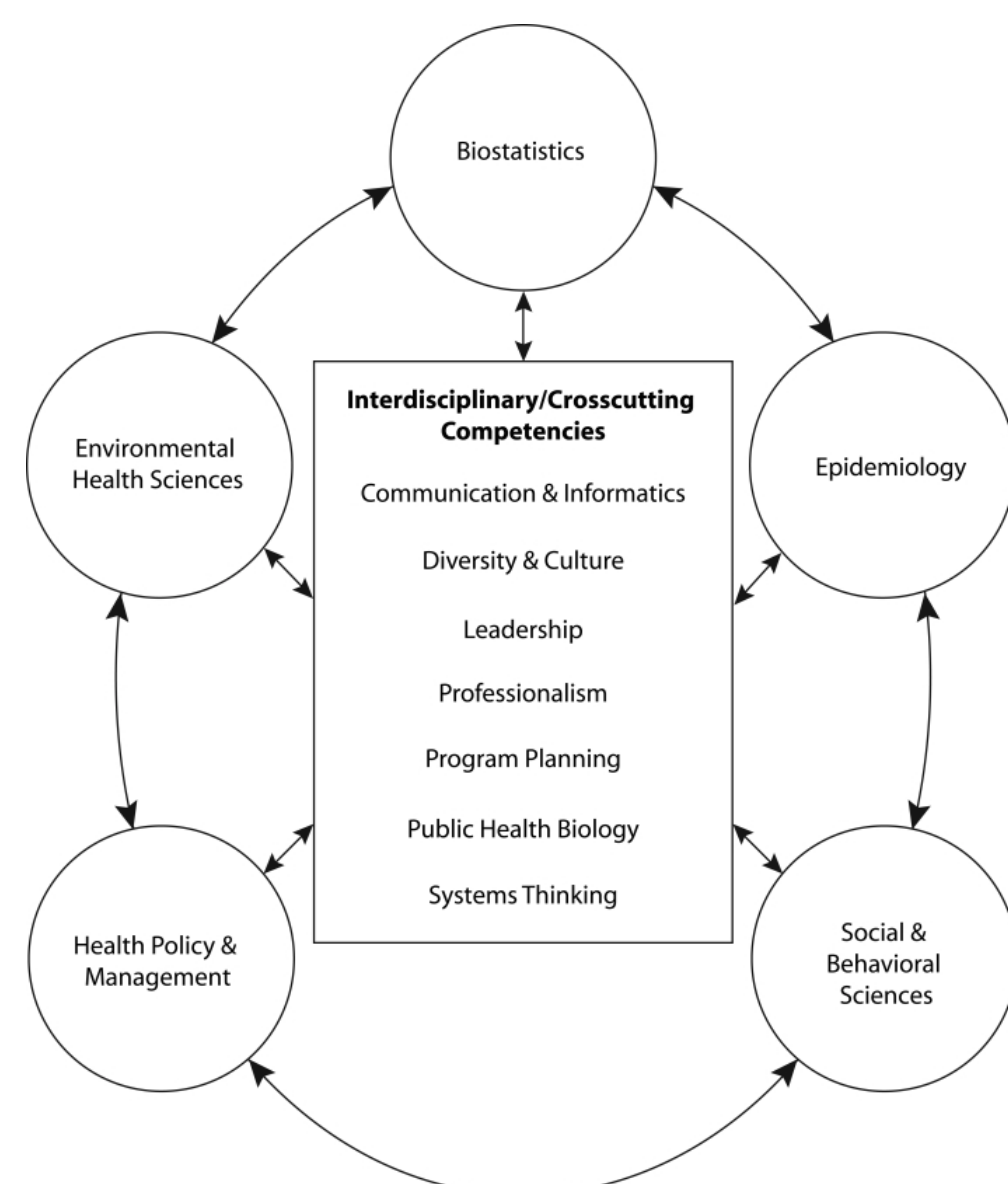


Challenge and Opportunity

Challenges for competency-based education in public health include low faculty interest and understanding¹ and a complex competency framework tied to accreditation.² Like other schools of public health³, the UAlbany SPH needs to better integrate competencies with curriculum and improve assessment. Current national efforts to redefine essential skills for the next generation of public health professionals provides a timely opportunity to enhance our competency-based approach.

ASPH Core Competency Model²

119 competencies across 5 core and 7 cross-cutting competency domains



Presented at the 2015 ELAM(R) Leaders Forum

Purpose

To develop and institutionalize an integrated competency-based MPH curriculum, by revising / streamlining current competencies, linking competencies to curriculum and course design, and establishing systematic competency assessment procedures.

Approach

Needs Assessment (Jan – Aug 2015)

Review of literature/best practices
 Faculty and student survey
 Alumni and employer input

Implementation (Fall 2015 – Spring 2016)

Faculty workshops
 Working groups revise competencies
 Pilot to link competencies, curriculum elements, and assessment strategies
 School-wide scale-up of pilot

Evaluation (Summer 2016)

Follow up surveys

Outcomes

Process:

- Streamlined set of competencies
- Explicit competency-curriculum linkages
- Systematic assessment processes

Impact:

- Knowledge/awareness of and engagement with competencies among faculty / students
- Competency attainment upon graduation
- Employer's assessment of competency attainment
- Accreditation outcomes

Preliminary Results and Discussion

Faculty knowledge of and engagement with existing competencies is low. Faculty survey will inform faculty development workshops.

Competency assessment approaches in public health are not well developed: models include student self-assessment via e-portfolios and assessments embedded in course requirements.

A smaller set of critical competencies that are well-linked to curriculum elements and tracked will lead to a curriculum that is more easily able to respond to changes in the profession.

References:

- ¹Calhoun JG, Wrobel CA, Finnegan JR. Current state in US public-health competency-based graduate education. *Public Health Rev.* 2011;33:148-167.
²Calhoun JG, Ramiah K, Weist EM, Shortell SM. Development of a core competency model for the Master of Public Health degree. *Am J Public Health.* 2008;98:1598-1607.
³Bennett CJ, Walston SL. Improving the use of competencies in public health education. *Am J Public Health.* 2015;105:S65-S67.