Criterion 2

Instructional Programs

2.12 Distance Education or Executive Degree Programs

CEPH Criterion

If the school offers degree programs using formats or methods other than students attending regular on-site course sessions spread over a standard term, these programs must a) be consistent with the mission of the school and within the school’s established areas of expertise; b) be guided by clearly articulated student learning outcomes that are rigorously evaluated; c) be subject to the same quality control processes that other degree programs in the school and university are; and d) provide planned and evaluated learning experiences that take into consideration and are responsive to the characteristics and needs of adult learners. If the school offers distance education or executive degree programs, it must provide needed support for these programs, including administrative, travel, communication, and student services. The school must have an ongoing program to evaluate the academic effectiveness of the format, to assess teaching and learning methodologies and to systematically use this information to stimulate program improvements.

CEPH Required Documentation

a. Identification of all degree programs that are offered in a format other than regular, on-site course sessions spread over a standard term, including those offered in full or in part through distance education in which the instructor and student are separated in time or place or both. The instructional matrix may be referenced for this purpose.

b. Description of the distance education or executive degree programs, including an explanation of the model or methods used, the school’s rationale for offering these programs, the manner in which it provides necessary administrative and student support services, the manner in which it monitors the academic rigor of the programs and their equivalence (or comparability) to other degree programs offered by the school, and the manner in which it evaluates the educational outcomes, as well as the format and methodologies.

c. Assessment of the extent to which this criterion is met.
2.12.a. Distance and Executive Degree Programs

**Required Documentation:** Identification of all degree programs that are offered in a format other than regular, on-site course sessions spread over a standard term, including those offered in full or in part through distance education in which the instructor and student are separated in time or place or both. The instructional matrix may be referenced for this purpose.

The school's distance and executive degree programs are described immediately below (2.12.b.) and are included on table 2.1.a (Instructional Matrix). They are the Executive DrPH in Health Leadership, and the Executive Master's Programs, offered by HPM, and the PHL Master’s Programs.

2.12.b. Distance and Executive Degree Program Descriptions

**Required Documentation:** Description of the distance education or executive degree programs, including an explanation of the model or methods used, the school's rationale for offering these programs, the manner in which it provides necessary administrative and student support services, the manner in which it monitors the academic rigor of the programs and their equivalence (or comparability) to other degree programs offered by the school, and the manner in which it evaluates the educational outcomes, as well as the format and methodologies.

The school improves the public's health by teaching both the next generation of public health leaders and current practitioners. To this end, the school offers distance education (DE) opportunities for working public health professionals throughout North Carolina, the US, and the world, especially important for working adults who wish to obtain an advanced degree. Distance-learning also enables the school to provide high-quality course work to public health professionals in geographic areas (including international) where educational opportunities may be limited and work demands high.

The school is a recognized leader in DE on campus and throughout the world, with several online master’s degrees and the only online Executive DrPH in Health Leadership in the United States. Distance learners have access to up-to-date technical resources and support, as well as curricula that are convenient and flexible, yet meaningful. The popularity of the school's distance learning courses is evident in the fact that many of the school's residential students take one or more courses online during their studies.

**Executive DrPH in Health Leadership**

The DrPH program in health leadership prepares midcareer professionals for top positions in organizations working to improve the public's health. The three-year, cohort-based distance program, offered by Health Policy and Management, confers a DrPH in Health Leadership. Students may be based in the US or abroad, provided they have reliable access to high-speed Internet services. (See [http://tinyurl.com/hpmdrph](http://tinyurl.com/hpmdrph).)
Model and Methods

Students receive instruction on campus for three to five days in late August, between the fall and spring semesters (early January), and between the spring and summer semesters (May). Otherwise, all learning takes place in students’ homes and offices. During the first August visit, students are oriented to the program, the department, and the university. In addition, they participate in group discussions with top health care and public health leaders, are introduced to the remainder of the first-semester curriculum, and receive software training. Thereafter, students connect to faculty and peers mainly via computer. Every course in the first two years is required of every student. The focus in the third year is on writing the dissertation, although students may also take two electives.

The DrPH program makes substantial use of innovative technologies (Internet Video, BreezeLive, and Blackboard) that allow students, faculty, and guest speakers to interact productively, and that support live video, audio, and data sharing. Each week, students receive study materials (such as recorded videos, narrative case studies, datasets, and readings) via the Web, and must complete required tasks before their regularly scheduled weekly late afternoon or evening class session (convened live via Internet Video). The three- to four-hour synchronous learning sessions, divided into curriculum components, are led by the faculty member or guest speaker responsible for a given component.

Program Rationale

The goal of the Executive DrPH in Health Leadership is to produce graduates with the motivation, knowledge, skills, and ability to become effective leaders. The program addresses the widely acknowledged need to develop stronger leaders committed to improving the health of the public. This need was brought into sharp focus by the Institute of Medicine’s (IOM) landmark 1988 report, *The Future of Public Health*, which concluded that "public health will serve society effectively only if a more efficient, scientifically sound system of practitioner and leadership development is established." Since release of the IOM report, other entities (including the Bureau of Health Professions, the Joint Council of Governmental Public Health Agencies, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) have also called for improved training of top health leaders.

In November 2002, the Institute of Medicine renewed and strengthened its call for improved training of future health leaders in two major reports. One of these reports, *The Future of the Public's Health in the 21st Century*, recommended that “leadership training, support, and development should be a high priority.” The other report, *Who Will Keep the Public Healthy*, focused on “Educating Public Health Professionals for the 21st Century.” The IOM notes that the changes that have occurred in the public health landscape since the original 1988 report require that educational programs for top health leaders and other professionals be modified and improved. The school’s DrPH leadership curriculum is a response to the IOM-identified need to design DrPH degrees specifically for advanced training in health leadership.
Administrative and Student Support Services

The director of the Executive DrPH in Health Leadership, Suzanne Havala Hobbs, DrPH, MS, RD, FADA, is responsible for all of the program’s administrative affairs, including administration of academic conduct, standards, and requirements. In addition, the director recommends admissions and financial support, matches advisors with students, approves dissertation committee chairs and members, advises the committees on interpretation of policies and requirements, rules on petitions in accordance with School of Public Health and Graduate School guidelines, and fulfills any other administrative duties or responsibilities delegated by the HPM chair. A DrPH Advisory Committee advises the director with regard to all program-related issues (e.g., admissions, curriculum).

The DrPH program director and HPM student services staff are available to work with students on general program matters and course registration issues. In addition, as soon as possible after matriculation, students are matched with a faculty advisor based in large part on mutual scholarly interests. Advisors guide students in interpreting course and program requirements and help identify dissertation committee members. In most cases, the faculty advisor also provides dissertation guidance, as chair of the student’s dissertation committee.

Academic Rigor and Equivalence Monitoring

Because the executive DrPH program is administered through the Graduate School, it is subject to the same level of scrutiny and oversight as the residential doctoral programs at the university. All executive DrPH courses are approved through the departments’ and school’s established processes, and are evaluated with the same tools as residential classes.

Evaluation of Educational Outcomes, Format, and Methodologies

Evaluation of educational outcomes, format, and methodologies includes both short-range and longer-range approaches. In the short-range category, the program director and former program director (Ned Brooks, DrPH) conduct informal, in-person debriefings at the conclusion of each on-campus session, with each cohort. Other short-term measures include reviewing statistics on average GRE scores (compiled on admission), electronic course evaluations (completed by students at the end of each semester), and an annual program report prepared for the Provost’s Office. The report addresses topics such as the cohort’s demographic characteristics, program assessment methods, assessment findings, changes made in the program based upon assessment findings, program successes, and barriers to continued success.

Midway through the first year of the executive DrPH program (January/2005), the school conducted a student evaluation of the coursework and program. All nine students in the first cohort participated in a focus group conducted by an HPM faculty member with 25 years of experience in executive education. The focus group elicited general feedback about
experiences in the program, as well as asking about ways in which the program had affected students’ lives. The evaluation also included specific questions about program administration, use of technology, the curriculum, and fall courses. A similar, evaluation will be repeated during the fifth program year (2010).

The school also uses two longer-range approaches to evaluate its executive DrPH program. First, the school maintains a database that will be regularly updated to track several indicators of success in meeting the objective of preparing top-level leaders committed to improving the health of the public. The database includes contact information, dissertation topic, years of matriculation and graduation, current position titles, and employers. Of particular interest, the database will document graduates’ career development from position upon graduation to five and ten years postgraduation, and beyond. Second, the school will survey graduates and their employers at 2, 5, and 10 years postgraduation to determine the extent to which graduates possess the competencies required for doctoral-level leadership and their current positions.

Executive Master’s Programs, Health Policy and Management

The “executive,” or distance learning, format for master’s degree study was first offered by HPM in 1969, and the executive healthcare master’s is one of the oldest programs of its kind in the country. Designed for working professionals worldwide, the Executive MPH and Executive MHA (EMP) programs include students from a variety of organizational settings, including integrated delivery systems, hospitals, HMOs, pharmaceutical firms, insurers, group practices, consulting firms, state and local health departments, and other government agencies (e.g., CDC, Public Health Service, Indian Health Service, Department of Defense). (See http://tinyurl.com/hpmemp.)

Enrollment is limited to 80 new students per year, admitted in two admission cycles of 40 students each, for the fall and spring semesters. The program is structured into three sessions per year, and requires that students attend two seven-day sessions and one four-day session on the Chapel Hill campus per year. During the remainder of the year, students complete work via the Internet by accessing individual course web sites equipped with specialized client-server software. Students generally take two courses per session, completing the MPH degree in 2-1/2 years and the MHA in 3-1/2 years.

The Executive MPH is a 48-credit hour (16-course) curriculum for those who aspire to executive public health positions, offering concentrated study in either dental public health or public sector management to working professionals worldwide. The two concentrations are very similar, with the dental public health concentration providing electives in the theory and practice of dental public health. All MPH students learn leadership and decision-making skills that can be applied to a range of highly technical and socially complex issues.

The Executive MHA is a 60-credit hour (20-course) curriculum that provides thorough preparation in the management disciplines—accounting, finance, marketing, operations
decision analysis, and continuous quality improvement, a comprehensive understanding of the healthcare sector, and a concentration in health services management for those who aspire to executive positions in hospitals or related health services. The Executive MHA is equivalent in rigor, expectations, curriculum, and learning experiences to the residential MHA.

**Model and Methods**

Typically, each of the three academic terms runs from 12 to 14 weeks, with students completing faculty guided learning at home during the nonresidential instructional phase. During the two seven-day sessions on campus, students complete instruction on the two courses started in the previous term, taking their final exam and/or presenting group projects. They also take three workshops on material not covered in courses. Finally, they start two new courses for the next term. Faculty use this time to assign students to groups, to outline requirements for the course, to give an overview of content to be covered and to meet with students on individual projects. Students leave campus with a full understanding of expectations and scope of work required. The summer residential session does not include workshops.

*Off Campus Time.* Students complete assignments weekly and meet online with their classmates and the faculty weekly or bi-weekly. The department uses a combination of course software and conferencing software to deliver material. Content is provided in a variety of formats including Word documents, pdf files, video files, voiced-over PowerPoint slides, Excel worksheets and Web-based references. Content is also delivered over a course management system that includes discussion forums, student interactive chat rooms, and live sessions. Faculty members also use a wide range of web-based tools such as Blogs, wikis, social bookmarking, YouTube, and other tools to deliver content.

*Three-day residential workshops.* The practicum experience for EMP students consists of a program-long structured journal in which students reflect on the content that they have learned in each of their courses and how this content can be applied in their professional environment. As part of the structured journal/practicum requirement, students are also required to complete Effective Executive Workshops while they are on campus: 15 workshops for the MHA and 12 workshops for the MPH. These workshops include topics such as creative thinking, systems thinking, writing effectively, political savvy, critical thinking, project management, conflict resolution, time management, negotiations, and memory management, to name a few.

*Two-day residential course initiation seminars.* Students start two new courses before leaving campus.
Program Rationale

In 1969, the North Carolina Division of Public Health Services asked the department to provide master’s-level educational instruction to state and local public health administrators. Intended as a one-time offering, the program proved so successful and was in such demand that the program was offered again in the following year. The need for professional training for public health administrators was extensive, so the program expanded rapidly throughout the state, with cohorts being offered in the eastern and western parts of the state. The goal of the program was to prepare leaders, through a comprehensive curriculum in management and leadership, to run public health and healthcare delivery systems. The program received national attention and in 1980 the W.K. Kellogg Foundation awarded the department funds to extend the program throughout the southeast. In 1992, the program was broadened to cover a national and international audience. Currently the program has almost 1400 graduates from almost every state as well as many other countries—Peru, Mexico, Egypt, Germany, Portugal, China, Canada, England, Chile.

Administrative and Student Support Services

As EMP program director for over twenty years, James Porto, PhD, MPA, has had overall responsibility for all of the program’s administrative affairs, including academic conduct, standards, and requirements. The EMP also includes a director of community preparedness and disaster management, a part-time marketing and information services coordinator, and a program manager located in the department’s Student Services Office. Administrative activities provided by these staff include handling applications, admissions, advising, scheduling, coordinating residential time, communicating to faculty and students, and preparing and providing information to students such as policy manuals, cohort facebooks, Graduate School forms, and announcements. Staff also ensure all requirements are met and facilitate graduation. Key administrative activities coordinated by the marketing director include responding to all inquiries, maintaining current web content, publishing announcements, pre-qualifying applicants, and providing information about EMP through a variety of channels, such as Google searches, Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn, and surveying students and graduates about improvements to the program. The EMP also coordinates delivery of administrative activities through a dedicated software Intranet, FirstClass®, that includes email capability, and conferencing and data storage capability accessible anywhere in the world though the Internet.

Academic Rigor and Equivalence Monitoring

The Executive MPH was originally (1969) modeled on the residential MSPH (rather than the MPH), as the MSPH was then the primary two-year residential degree offered by the department. The MHA and the Executive MHA were added in 1992. Many of the faculty members who teach in the residential program also teach in the EMP, which ensures equivalence in content between both MHA formats, even though delivery methods are different. Most adjunct faculty who teach in the EMP have taught for more than five years,
some as many as 15. Faculty members in the executive and residential programs correspond closely; syllabi are routinely shared and course content discussed. Also adjunct faculty members are invited to professional development seminars sponsored by the department. In 2009, the department adopted a competency-based and team-based initiative to improve content delivery; and adjunct faculty members who teach in the EMP have been very active in these efforts. The EMP director, along with the Master’s Advisory Committee, continually reviews content, solicits input from students, and meets with faculty to discuss ways to improve content delivery.

Anecdotally, faculty members who teach in both programs find that mean performance between the executive and residential programs is essentially the same on midterm and final exams. Most faculty, however, find that Executive students provide a richer discussion around education content because all of them are currently working and bring professional, relevant insights into the classroom.

**Evaluation of Educational Outcomes, Format, and Methodologies**

Many evaluation methods are utilized by the EMP at all levels. Courses are evaluated informally at mid-term, and formally through an online survey at the end of the course. Formal evaluations are reviewed by the HPM chair and the EMP director, as well as the course instructor.

To receive input and suggestions the director meets with students in an “all students” session every time they are on campus. Some of the suggestions from these sessions have led to major changes and improvements. The adoption of the Executive MHA, the conversion to a predominantly online program, and shortening the cycle for starting new cohorts were changes suggested by students. The director also meets with students on specific problems arising around courses or course requirements.

The department also evaluates the program through surveys conducted to recent graduates. Material from these surveys is reviewed and changes identified to improve programs are adopted. In 2002 a formal survey lasting over six months was conducted of recent EMP graduates. This survey provided insights that led to improvements, especially around administrative procedures and technology. Currently the program and the department are developing the ability to rapidly survey students and graduates with evaluation technologies such as SurveyMonkey and other online tools.

**Public Health Leadership Master’s Programs**

A distinguishing feature of the Public Health Leadership Program (PHLP) is that two of the program’s three MPH degree concentrations (Leadership and Occupational Health Nursing [OHN]) are distance learning programs (http://tinyurl.com/phlpmph and http://tinyurl.com/mphohn), although a substantial portion of instruction in the Occupational Health Nursing MPH concentration—not exceeding 25%—is on-campus. In comparison, the Leadership MPH program presents virtually all class material via the Internet, using narrated
slide presentations, and requiring less than one week per semester on campus. Taking advantage of the unique opportunity to earn an MPH degree in an online format, the majority of PHLP students are enrolled as distance education students. This program replicates the classroom experience by using Web-based courses that include lectures, discussion forums, group and individual assignments, papers, and exams.

DE students in the Leadership MPH concentration have a choice of four focus areas: field epidemiology, public health nursing, public health practice, and program development. Field epidemiology students develop advanced skills in applied epidemiology and learn to incorporate applied epidemiology into their professional endeavors. Public health nursing is designed for public health nurses who want to fulfill the degree requirements for National League of Nursing (NLN) accreditation, explore the nursing role, or teach in a nursing setting. Public health practice is recommended for students in professional positions who want to expand their public health practice knowledge and skills. Program development students hone their public health program development and evaluation skills; students also may choose either public health policy or public health marketing courses to complete their degree.

**Model and Methods**

The key to the development of high-quality distance education in PHLP has been to provide distance students with the same experience or better than that received by traditional residential students. In its formative stages, PHLP drew on previous experience of other programs in the school that had successfully used distance formats, including EPID and HPM’s EMP. Input from experienced developers of online academic programs in other universities was also critical.

Five major concepts have guided PHLP’s development and implementation of DE programs over the past ten years: access, impact; cost efficiency, technology, and quality. The primary reason for developing a DE format has been the need to provide the public health workforce with the best possible access to a high quality education. The DE programs also seek to have maximum impact on practitioners by minimizing time away from work and family, offering flexible learning options, and focusing on the needs of adult learners. To improve cost efficiency, all DE components of PHLP share the goal of becoming self-sustaining through a combination of grants, tuition, and teamwork. Technology is the fourth essential feature of PHLP’s DE efforts. The school’s technological infrastructure (including its Instructional and Information Systems group [IIS]) ensures that the DE program marries appropriate technology with strong long distance linkages among students, faculty, and advisors. Finally, PHLP has implemented a form of continuous quality improvement (CQI, adapted for educational purposes) to make certain that both distance and residential students receive a high quality educational experience that adheres to pedagogical standards.
Program Rationale

A significant number of public health and health care, or clinical research, practitioners either lack a master’s degree in public health or would benefit from further skills and training in public health practice. The DE degrees (and certificates) target full-time, midcareer public health practitioners whose professional and family obligations prevent them from enrolling as full-time residential students in Chapel Hill. The PHLP’s DE offerings also address the pressing need for leadership training, which is greatest among the very group of practitioners who are least able to leave their jobs to become full-time students.

Administrative and Student Support Services

The DE program uses a “high tech/high touch” approach to guide administrative and student support services. This approach fosters strong, regular interactions among students, faculty, advisors, and mentors through team-based learning and the use of a range of technologies, including online/Internet technology, individual telephone calls, conference calls, and face-to-face meetings when needed and convenient. Two important features of this strategy are a commitment not only to simulate but also to improve on the traditional on-campus experience, and the inclusion of “just enough” face-to-face experiences (as defined by faculty, students, and program needs) to supplement technology.

IIS and the broader platform of campuswide resources support the DE programs’ individualized approach to technology. The IIS group includes support staff, such as instructional designers who work with faculty to strengthen course design and delivery. Campus support includes hardware, software, and services such as 24-hour help lines that are available to all students.

Academic Rigor and Equivalence Monitoring

PHLP focuses on maintaining the highest level of quality in teaching and practice. Quality is the criterion around which PHLP programs grow and develop, and PHLP conforms to the same rigorous ongoing review standards as other academic units in the school. The program follows procedures that are required by the Graduate School, the university registrar, and the university provost. The public health nursing focus area (a subset of the Leadership MPH) and the Occupational Health Nursing MPH concentration meet the specialized standards of the NLN and are accredited by NLN. PHLP’s use of CQI (characterized by systematic evaluation with ongoing data collection and analysis) helps PHLP identify and correct problems, and develop online courses and programs that meet the continuously changing needs of DE students.

Evaluation of Educational Outcomes, Format, and Methodologies

Several published articles have evaluated the PHLP DE programs, and have found a wide range of positive program effects, including program satisfaction, career advancement,

In addition to using CQI, PHLP conducts an annual alumni survey to assess its performance. The survey results have reiterated the findings of the published articles described above, indicating that DE students are satisfied with their education and the program format and methodologies. In the most recent survey, 100% of DE program graduates reported that they would recommend the program to other students, and 96% stated that the program had met their career development expectations.
2.12.c. Assessment of Distance Education or Executive Degree Programs

Required Documentation: Assessment of the extent to which this criterion is met.

Strengths

- High quality and accessible distance education degree programs that attract students
- Distance learning programs well established (some for 40 years)
- Most programs have been evaluated; some of the evaluations have resulted in peer-reviewed journal articles
- Online and residential course equivalence in terms of rigor and participation qualifications, as documented through evaluations
- SPH has been an innovator in developing distance learning programs

Challenges

- Optimizing balance between on-campus time and convenience of distance courses
- Fostering strong person-to-person connections and interactions
- Assessing future needs, given the current economic climate

Future Directions

- Assure that we revise programs as appropriate to maintain currency
- Periodically reassess our technology, especially platforms and equipment for optimal learning experience
- Assess the viability of new pilot efforts to expand programs globally
- Complete a current assessment of certificate and related programs to determine how they may need to change in the future and to assure that the business models are sustainable

This Criterion is met.