This issue of the Journal of Public Health Management and Practice (Vol. 12, Issue 5) focuses on the Management Academy for Public Health. This is a management development program jointly offered by the School of Public Health and the Kenan-Flagler Business School at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill since 1999. Initially funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Health Resources Services Administration, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and originally taking students from four southern states, the Management Academy is now a revenue-supported program that attracts participants from every region of the country. It is an intensive, 9-month, team-based program, using coursework in Chapel Hill, distance learning activities, and a capstone project consisting of a complete business plan that participants are expected to implement after being graduated from the program. A hallmark of the program is that it is thoroughly cross-disciplinary between public health and business, with the goal of applying business methods of management and business planning to public health issues. This orientation affects every aspect of the program and models the type of partnering between public health and business people that program planners believe is essential for successfully meeting the challenges faced by public health managers every day.

A major theme of my tenure as Dean of the UNC School of Public Health was collaboration across departments, disciplines, schools, and sectors. I was fortunate to have colleagues in the school and across campus who shared the ideal of strengthening the whole by cooperative endeavor. We believed—we still believe—that cross-disciplinary, collaborative initiatives can make a real change in important arenas.

When the Request for Proposals for the Management Academy was issued, we at the University of North Carolina were most excited by the idea of combining business and public health expertise to improve the effectiveness of public health systems. Robert Sullivan, then Dean of the UNC Kenan-Flagler Business School, and I had spoken about the need for managers in public health to understand and use state-of-the-art business methods, strategies, and tools in public health decision-making. In a time of mounting public health needs and shrinking resources, increasing the management skills of senior, midlevel, and entry-level staff clearly was a critical strategy for addressing tremendous challenges in local and state health departments throughout the region.

The first section of articles that follow sketches the background of the Management Academy’s development, describing first the program design and how it works to develop public health managers (Orton et al), and then stepping back to trace the broad demographic, socioeconomic, and political trends reshaping public health in the 1990s and today that went into the design (Johnson et al), as well as describing how various partners came together to conceive of the program (Baker et al) and to design and develop it (Porter et al). These articles outline the critical success factors that have made the program so popular and successful.

The second section of articles in this special issue examines the outcomes from the Management Academy—what this program has made possible in individual and organizational achievement. Umble et al provide an overview of the external outcomes...
evaluation of the program’s pilot years (1999–2003),
defining precisely what the Management Academy is
trying to teach and detailing the impact—on the indi-
viduals and organizations that have participated in
the program—of having addressed these learning goals.
This overview of outcomes is followed by six case stud-
ies written by public health managers who attended the
Management Academy and accomplished with their
learning exactly what the planners intended for them
to do. They took their learning—usually in the form
of the business plan created for the program’s capstone
assignment—and applied it to the challenges they faced
in their home communities. Like public health man-
gagers everywhere, these individuals are grappling with
being the provider of last resort for the growing num-
ber of un- or underinsured citizens in their districts;
providing mental health services to the poor and indig-
ent; protecting the population against threats to their
health—from rabies, to chronic disease, to bioterrorism,
and other disasters—and, finally, facilitating the work
of others who work to improve population health by
providing the support, information, and technological
resources for them to do so.

The difficulty (for the editors) in this section was
choosing who among the Management Academy grad-
uates should write—perhaps a team from southern
Georgia that developed a home visitation program to
provide medical care and support to families with a
preterm child; or a Portsmouth, Virginia, team that cre-
ated a fee-based program to prevent lead poisoning; or a
South Carolina program funded by restaurants to create
safety training materials for food workers, or another to
prevent asthma in that state. The decisions came down,
often, to availability to write, for truly scores of gradu-
ates from across the target area would have had inspir-
ing stories to tell about their successes.

One of the greatest challenges facing public health
today is the increased demand for accountability and ef-
cfectiveness. Society, in general, is demanding account-
ability for resource expenditure in a variety of ways
and across disciplines and fields. In the case of the pro-
vision of public health services and healthcare delivery,
this demand creates challenges and opportunities as we
strive to strike a balance among efficiency, accessibility,
and quality in all areas of the public’s health. Public
health managers have myriad jobs: they must supervise
people who are providing services; analyze data and
use it to develop new programs, evaluate existing pro-
grams, and make the case for programs to an expanding
and increasingly attentive constituency; and administer
a budget to pay for these efforts. Clearly, strong skills—
gleaned not only from years of experience in public
health management but also from a sound education
in business methods and modes of thinking—will help
the individuals who hold these positions of great re-
sponsibility.

But beyond basic business skills, the very act of join-
ing forces with the business community and, by ex-
tension, understanding the concept of partnering more
generally, is an important element of the Management
Academy program. One of our best decisions in cre-
ating the program, and one that mirrors our original
cross-disciplinary collaboration, was to stipulate that
students come in teams, and to suggest that these teams
include community partners. Through these elements
we teach how to create and maintain partnerships—not
only with others involved in protecting and improving
the public’s health, such as healthcare providers, first
responders, law enforcement personnel, etc, but also
with politicians and, of course, the business commu-
nity. Such partnerships not only help individuals but
also improve systems and redefine public health, al-
lowing us to broaden our reach by joining forces with
an ever-widening circle of colleagues. The case studies
included in this issue examine how such partnerships
can work in the real world of public health practice.

Finally, the last submissions in the issue are by noted
personages in the fields of public health and healthcare,
who were solicited, based on their expertise, experi-
ence, and thoughtfulness on these issues, to provide
commentary on the Management Academy for Pub-
lic Health, on management education in public health
more generally, or on the state of public health. They
were asked to think about the implications of applying
a business model to social service allocation, what ele-
ments of the program seemed most and least relevant to
them and their colleagues, or what recommendations
they had for an audience of public health leaders, policy
makers, managers, potential sponsors of public health
initiatives, and others interested in the workings of the
public health system. On the whole, the commentary
writers endorse the Management Academy model, and
each provides valuable advice about how the program
should proceed.

The Management Academy for Public Health, with
its emphasis on bringing people together to think in
new ways about public health, is making a difference in
how public health professionals address the daunting
set of challenges they face today and will face in the
future.