

Masters in Health Sciences External Review Report Spring 2008

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I. Introduction

a. A description of visit length

The visit began at 6:00 p.m. on Sunday, February 10, 2008 with team members meeting until 9:00 p.m.

The visit continued on Monday, February 11, 2008 with team members meeting from 7:30 a.m. until 9:00 p.m.

The visit ended on Tuesday, February 12, 2008 with team members meeting from 8:30 am to 10:00 a.m.

b. A summary and description of meetings conducted by the review team

The review team met with the following personnel and conducted interviews:

Director of the School of Health Sciences (Phil Kneller), Program Director in Health Sciences (Marianne Hollis), Dean of the College of Health and Human Sciences (Linda Seestedt-Stanford), Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs (Beth Tyson Lofquist), Dean of Educational Outreach (Pat Brown), Faculty and staff of the Health and Human Sciences MHS program (Marianne Hollis, Ted Chiappelli, Marcia Caserio, Wayne Billon, Mike Hubble, Jay Scifers, Ann Hallyburton), Dean of the Graduate School and Research (Scott Higgins), Associate Dean of the Graduate School (Brian Gastle) and Director of Coulter Faculty Center (Anna McFadden).

Additionally, the review team examined all supporting documentation provided.

II. Masters of Health Sciences (MHS) Program

The MHS Program is a Resident Program with many face-to-face as well as online courses, thus defined as hybrid. Students can receive a MHS degree in four active concentration areas: Management, Nutrition, Education, and Gerontology. Environmental Health concentration is currently "inactive." Two new concentrations are presently being proposed as concentration areas for the MHS Degree Program: Athletic Training and Emergency Medical Care.

The MHS Program has 2 full-time, tenure-track faculty, 2 part-time, tenure-track faculty, and 4 adjunct faculty. MHS fixed-term faculty consists of 1 part-time person contracted through Educational Outreach, and a 0.8 faculty member who teaches in Nutrition. The Program has 1.75 full-time equivalent administrative assistant staff support person. Currently, 62 graduate students are enrolled in the MHS Program. The Program has done a very good job of cross-listing courses that are appropriate for more than one concentration area, thus utilizing faculty resources more efficiently, and giving the students exposure to other disciplines. It appears that the faculty in the Program work well together, and are very creative and motivated in planning and assessing the curriculum for the MHS degree across the various concentrations.

The MHS Program consists of 3 core courses required by all concentrations. The courses are as follows:

MHS 510 – Systems and Policy in Health Care

MHS 675 – Research Methodology in Health Sciences (prerequisite MHS 510)

Commented [MW1]: Are you referring to the .80 faculty members here? → MH This refers to Wayne Billon (who just received tenure) and Susan Bogardus in Nutrition. I didn't count Burt Ogle since the ENVH track is functionally inactive. The 0.8 FTE refers to Sally Feltner, a 0.8 instructor in Nutrition.

MHS 696 – Research Seminar in Health Sciences

The Management concentration courses are taught by 1 full-time, tenure-track faculty, 1 part-time faculty person, and 3 adjunct faculty. This Management concentration has been in existence since 1986 and appears to be a very stable degree concentration. The courses are appropriate and of sufficient academic rigor, as noted not only by the course syllabi but by the comments of the students in the focus groups. The faculty teaching the courses have appropriate degrees and/or experience in management, the focus is well defined and appropriate to the mission of the MHS Program and to Western Carolina University. Presently, thirteen graduate students are enrolled in the Management concentration; there has been no appreciable attrition in this concentration over the past two years. To date, the region has been served well by this degree concentration, especially in the area of health care management.

The Nutrition concentration courses are taught by 2 full-time, tenure-track faculty, 1 fixed-term faculty, and 1 adjunct internship director. The Nutrition concentration courses are appropriate and of sufficient academic rigor, as documented by the course syllabi. This MHS concentration has been in existence since 1992 and appears to have a problem with retention. To become a registered dietician, upon completing a bachelor's degree, a person must enroll in and complete an internship in a nutrition graduate program to fulfill ADA requirements. Thus, many students once they have completed the graduate internship choose to drop out of the program, as the internship was the only academic piece needed in order to become a registered dietician. If the ADA regulations change requiring a masters degree to become certified as a registered dietician, than the retention problem may resolve itself. At the round table meeting with the faculty on Monday, February 11th, the need for a full-time faculty internship director was discussed as another means to helping resolve the attrition issue. The Nutrition concentration has twenty-two graduate students currently enrolled in the MHS Program.

The Education concentration courses are taught by 1 full-time tenure-track faculty, and 1 part-time phased retirement faculty person. The Education concentration has been in existence since the fall of 1986. Currently, there are fourteen students enrolled in the Education concentration. The courses have a public health perspective on education and are appropriate and of sufficient academic rigor, as noted not only by the course syllabi but by the comments of the students in the focus groups. The faculty teaching the courses have appropriate degrees and/or experience in public health – health education, the focus is well defined and appropriate to the mission of the Program and to Western Carolina University. To date, the region has been served well by this degree concentration, especially in the area of a master's degree for nurses who wanted to move into either the roles of educators or managers. Recently the masters program in nursing has adopted a concentration in education as a part of their degree. There is concern within the administration that this may be a duplication of services, and that the nursing market was a majority of the student enrollment in this concentration. However, the disciplines of students currently enrolled in this concentration are coming from the following disciplines: dental hygiene, nursing, pharmacy, nutrition, and extension service. The Program may need to more clearly identify its recruitment pool for meeting the needs of the region.

The Gerontology concentration courses are taught by 1 full-time tenure-track faculty, and 1 part-time contract person. The Gerontology concentration is the newest concentration as of 2004. The MHS Program also recently acquired in October of 2007, the certificate program in Gerontology. The faculty is presently revisiting the Gerontology curriculum. As the region is "Aging" demographically, in order to meet the service needs of the region (a mission of WCU), the University will have to have professionals in many disciplines trained in

gerontology/geriatrics. Currently, there are thirteen graduate students enrolled in the Gerontology concentration.

The two new proposed concentrations: Athletic Training and Emergency Medical Care both will fulfill a regional need and both concentrations have a waiting list of candidates in anticipation of the advance degree beginning in the 2008-2009 academic year. Both of the proposed new concentrations curricula tie in well with the existing four concentrations' courses. Emergency Medical Care noted that it will need cross training in Gerontology. The undergraduate program has had a 63% increase in student applicants. The reviewers learned that there is a professional shortage of emergency medics and that only twelve schools in the nation offer this degree. Presently, the Program feels they have enough faculty to adequately launch this new graduate program. Emergency Medical Care has 3 full-time tenure-track faculty, one fixed-term, and 3 adjuncts. The only resource needed is one full-time technical support person. Presently this concentration has a 20 hour per week technical support person. Athletic Training has 3 full-time tenure-track faculty and several adjunct faculty. The faculty stated they are ready to roll out the master's degree program. The faculty stated that there are only a handful of universities offering a degree in athletic training.

III. Analysis of Faculty

The full-time tenured and tenure-track faculty that service the Master of Health Sciences (MHS) Program are to be commended for their dedication to the program and for the initiative that they have undertaken to put forward a revised MHS Program with several fields of concentration.

The current faculty has a diverse, rich and practical background in the health sciences field. This is essential since the MHS Program, both in its current and proposed state, is a professional degree that is geared to adult learners and professionals in the health sciences and related fields. At the same time, additional tenure-track faculty as well as selected "practitioners in residence" for the program is warranted in order to both reduce the advising and service load of current faculty and give them additional time for appropriate research and program management/outreach endeavors.

The current faculty has also shown sensitivity to changing curriculum needs in the field, by establishing new courses teaching about the fundamentals of Medicare and Medicaid. Such courses are essential along with proposed courses on health law to provide the comprehensive studies in the fields covered by the current and proposed health sciences program. The combined curriculum of the several fields of study allows for an interdisciplinary approach in the several fields of study in the proposed MHS program – a fact that enhances the value of the concentrations in the MHS program.

It is clear to the reviewers that the curriculum, teaching, advising, and outreach duties that the current faculty has assumed greatly stretches the resources of the current faculty. They do not have enough time to devote to appropriate research endeavors. To that end, additional faculty resources are warranted along with reduced teaching loads.

It is the judgment of the reviewers that the proposed expansion of the MHS go forward as structured by the most recent faculty draft. Additional market research and high-quality competitor analysis might be warranted, but if an expanded and invigorated program does not go forward, various in-state and out of state competitors will most surely take the place of the vacuum left by a weak or faltering MHS Program.

Commented [W2]: MH - We already have a 'Legal Environment' course in the Management concentration; however, we have/are proposing courses in 'Long Term Care Continuum' in Gerontology, 'Health Communications' in Education and 'Biostatistics' as a new core course to support graduate research needs. MH

The reviewers are also not unmindful of the fairly arcane tuition regulations that affect face to face, online, and distance education offerings. Certainly WCU faculty and administrators must continue to push for rationalizing these regulations that otherwise seem to impede a well-reasoned approach to a revised MHS program.

IV. Analysis of Operational Facilities and Budget

- a. Does the program have adequate facilities to meet their educational mission?

Based on the information provided by the program areas and interviews with individuals and groups as identified above, current facilities are adequate, but the faculty are actively involved in the design of a new building for the college which will address all aspects of the Program needs for each concentration.

- b. Does the program have adequate budget to meet their educational mission?

The identified needs in the area of budget are as follows:

1. Instructional design assistance for an online program; and
2. Additional faculty in individual concentrations, which appears to be on the planning agenda of the dean, director of the school and program director.

V. Summary of program strengths and areas for improvement

General impressions of the Master of Health Science Degree Program (MHS) are that to date, this graduate degree has served the needs of the region well in training professionals in health care management, health education, nutrition, and that the student body receiving this degree has been representative of the region's population. The faculty of the program are committed to the work of the unit and articulate a solid grasp of program needs. There is administrative support at the level of the program director, director of the school and dean of the college.

Program Strengths (reviewers 1 & 3)

Program strengths include the following:

- Dedicated, well-qualified, motivated faculty willing to support the students in their research endeavors;
- Curricula of sufficient academic rigor and appropriate content;
- Faculty Center that provides support to all faculty in all areas of faculty development as well as curriculum development;
- Support for distance education curriculum development which includes \$3000 per new course plus assessment;
- A lot of support for online courses both from the Faculty Center and from the Dean of Distance Education;
- Multi-methods of course offerings in order to meet the needs of the region's graduate student/working population. Multi-methods meaning face-to-face, distance learning, and hybrid(combination of face-to-face and online);
- Faculty teach in both the undergraduate and graduate courses, thus this pipeline for recruitment into the MHS Program can be seen as a Program strength. The Program has done a very good job of cross-listing courses that are appropriate for more than one concentration area, thus utilizing faculty resources more efficiently, and giving the students exposure to other disciplines;

- The development and planning for a new state of the art facility; and,
- It appears that the faculty in the program work well together, and are very creative and motivated in planning and assessing the curriculum for the MHS degree across various concentrations/disciplines.

Program Strengths (reviewer 2)

The basic strength of the current and proposed MHS program is the quality, dedication, and initiative of all the current faculty of both the current and revised program. They are thoughtful, have a clear vision of how the program should be revised, and are committed to make the program a success. The proposed curriculum, for the most part, is also sound and creates an appropriate interdisciplinary approach to studies in the various concentrations.

Mention should also be made here of the excellent work of the Faculty Center. That Center certainly enables current and future MHS faculty the ability to develop enhanced online and web-enhanced course offerings in way that many larger universities have ignored to date. This center is an essential ingredient in the attractiveness of an enhanced MHS Program.

Areas in Need of Improvement (all reviewers)

- Insufficient number of tenure-track faculty in the concentrations of Education, Management, and Gerontology. Nutrition concentration needs a full-time internship director.
- Gerontology curriculum needs to be revisited. Need to assess the appropriateness of the course content with regards to the needs of the region’s job market.
- Insufficient faculty to meet the demand of multi-methods of course offerings in order to meet the needs of the region’s graduate student/working population. Multi-methods meaning face to face, distance learning, and hybrid (combination of face to face and on-line).

Of note to the reviewers were the discordant views among various administrative personnel, including the Dean of the College, the Dean of Graduate Studies, and the Dean of Educational Outreach. These discordant views need to be both ironed out and a frank and open discussion about the revised MHS Program, chaired by the Provost of the University, should be conducted with all parties, faculty and administration involved. The starting point for discussion should be the proposal originally endorsed by the Provost and set forth for the reviewers during their site visit. Absent the aforementioned action, the future of the current MHS Program is unclear at best.

The concentrations within the degree need to be closely examined within the context of the resources available to support them. With the degree currently being approved as a resident degree, the mention of one concentration being delivered totally at a distance needs to be examined. If the decision remains to not pursue this as a distance *degree* then there should not be a concentration within the degree that is delivered totally online, since the degree is the driving force for determining tuition and percentage of program delivered “at a distance.” Faculty and administration are encouraged to pursue the viability of distance education to serve the constituents, so WCU does not miss out on opportunities inherent in distance education.

Commented [MW3]: What proposal, specifically, are you referring to? MH – They are referring to the proposed curriculum revisions to MHS, which we presented in Feb/Mar 2007, the last of which was to the Provost, who verbally ‘endorsed’ it and encouraged us to move forward.

VI. Summary of Recommendations

1. Move forward with an expanded MHS Degree Program that adds the two new concentrations of Athletic Training and Emergency Medical Care to the resident degree program.
2. Keep the structure of the current and proposed MHS Program with concentrations in current and proposed areas.
3. Strive over time to have a distance education degree designation for the MHS Program.
4. Retain current MHS faculty and plan for additional tenure track and “expert practitioner” faculty.
5. Continue to use the excellent resources of the Faculty Center to provide high quality distance education in the MHS program.
6. Increase the research capabilities of current and future staff with a combination of release time from courses as well as funds for conference participation.
7. Add at least 1.5 full time administrative staff to the MHS Program to assist with the varied and sundry administrative duties that are now handled by educational faculty.
8. Continue, at the highest levels of WCU administration, to enhance all graduate program distance education by working to change antiquated tuition charges and reimbursement schemes that prevent WCU for enhancing its graduate education future.

Thanks are extended by the reviewers to the program and school directors, deans, and associate provost for the information and time provided to facilitate this review.