

Eight-Year Program Review IBHE Report Summary: see attached Resources page

PROGRAM REVIEW REPORT SUMMARY

- 1. Reporting Institution:** Eastern Illinois University
- 2. Program Reviewed:** M.S. in Health Promotion (formerly M.S. in Health Promotion and Leadership)
- 3. Date:** 2.6.2024
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5. OVERVIEW

The M.S. in Health Promotion has a mission to train the next generation of health promotion professionals with the competencies and skills they need to be productive professionals at the local, regional, and national level. It is housed in the College of Health and Human Services in the Department of Public Health and Nutrition. Our program is aligned with the Graduate School's mission and EIU's mission in our commitment to diversity, excellence, and accessibility in education; our support for student-faculty scholarship as well as our ability to prepare candidates for career advancement and responsible citizenship.

Similar programs are offered at Northern Illinois University, Illinois State University, Southern Illinois University, and University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Our program is distinct in our ability to match graduate students with meaningful graduate projects that can contribute to their career advancement, support their research agenda, or prepare them to accomplish their career goals. Our program offers flexibility and accessibility in that all courses are offered at least once a year, and only 33 credit hours are required for completion. Other programs require over 40, except NIU.

Interviews with recent graduates have revealed that students appreciate working with faculty one-on-one, the flexibility of a program that is 100% online, the personal connection with each professor and that the connection has served them in gaining employment, admission to a doctoral program, or advancing in their career.

Objectives include demonstrating: an in-depth knowledge of content in planning, administering, managing and evaluating health education programs; critical thinking and problem solving skills by assessing needs, assets and capacity for health interventions; effective oral & written communication skills in communicating and advocating for health; evidence of advanced scholarship through research and/or creative activity related to health; an understanding and respect for professional ethics in the discipline. Most of the students have goals of advancing in their career, maintaining competency in the profession, or preparation for another degree (BSN, Ph.D.)

Changes to the program include joining a new college, The College of Health and Human Services, changing the name to align with the curriculum, curricular changes, changes in the admission processes, development of an accelerated master's and second master's program.

Some achievements are that several of our recent graduates received promotions within a month of earning their degree, at least 3 have started Ph.D. programs, and one has completed a BSN. Graduate projects have included coordinating a conference on Cottage Food Safety with certification, a handbook on preparing for and responding to state inspections at assisted living facilities, research on mental health resources for D1 athletes, exploring infant feeding practices and cultural expectations, and experiences with infertility treatments, among many others.

Plans for the future include focusing on recruitment of career professionals, development of marketing materials, and leveraging connections with alumni. We also plan to evaluate and revise curriculum based on student preference, employer demand, and developing some requirements for earning credit for prior learning.

6. MAJOR FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

a.

- (1) While the health field is everchanging, one obvious change in the field was the influence of the pandemic. Responding to the pandemic highlighted areas of inadequacies in the public health system, leading us to review curriculum to ensure we are preparing our candidates for the workforce. During the pandemic, our students were offered many hands-on (and paid) opportunities to practice responding to this public health emergency. Further, because of the pandemic, additional funds are being provided through IDPH (Strengthening Illinois Public Health Administration, SIPA) to public health agencies to prepare the next generation of health promotion professionals. This, combined with how the pandemic also highlighted the need for health promotion heroes, has incentivized more people to enter the field. This is a growing field. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2023) projects 7% employment growth in health education specialists (faster than average), and employment in health management/administration is growing much faster than other fields at 29% by 2032. For management positions, experience is a must, so it is helpful if students can get into the field while pursuing their master's degree. The health field is interdisciplinary, so some students may need to develop other skills and competencies by earning a second master's. We have built partnerships with several other programs that align with other careers in health: Aging Studies, Sustainability, Human Services, as well as others to offer a second master's path, that allows students to include up to 3 courses in their study plans for both master's degrees.
- (2) The program is accessible for all students and meets student demands in terms of content, delivery method, and scheduling. Students must take 3 electives. There are several electives, and if a candidate finds a relevant course they want to take to round out their education, they can. Candidates have a choice of completing a thesis or a graduate project. Either option affords the student the opportunity to pursue a passion or community or workplace project. While the assignments in each course are structured, students choose the topics to make them relevant to their career path. For example, they can choose the research topic for the research proposal; they can choose the community they review for their behavior change intervention. In terms of delivery methods, most of our students are very satisfied with the online option. For students who are on campus and want face-to-face experiences, they can take in-person electives, meet with instructors in person, and attend scholarly campus events. There are no synchronous courses, so people in very different time zones (Shanghai, for example) or chaotic schedules (new parents, shift workers) can complete our flexible program, especially as professors are happy to meet with students outside of traditional "school" hours. In terms of scheduling, we offer our core courses at least once each year. Students can take up to 4 courses each semester finishing in 3 semesters. Students in the accelerated program can finish the program in 3 semesters by taking only 3 courses each semester. We have changed the way we schedule classes. We have 7 core classes and offer 3 in the fall, 3 in the spring, and 1 in the summer. The core courses are offered such that one meets over the entire semester; one meets first 8 weeks, and one meets the second 8 weeks. This is helpful, so people who are working in the field can make time for this pursuit. We encourage students who enter the master's program right after earning their undergraduate degree to seek entry-level employment in the health field, and the course schedule allows for that. We have made the program more accessible by adopting an accelerated master's program. This effort allows our strongest students to take up to 3 courses and count them toward the undergraduate *and* graduate degrees while avoiding redundancy in programming. One change that we have made to the accelerated master's program since its launch is change the GPA for consideration of the program. Initially, students had to have an overall GPA of 3.25. We recognized that there were talented students in our program who did not qualify because they were in a different major previously and it was not the right fit, so while their overall GPA suffered, the GPA in the major was quite high (once they found the right fit). Currently, students can qualify for the accelerated master's program by having an overall GPA of 3.25 or a major GPA of 3.75.

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- (3) Societal needs addressed through our program include gaps in the future public health workforce from pandemic burnout to long-term staff retiring. Societal needs addressed through health promotion include: violence prevention, quality healthcare access, prenatal health, health disparities, obesity, lack of green space/safe places to play, safe and healthy communities, access to affordable healthy foods, declining mental health, increase in substance use, harm reduction, poverty and other social determinants of health. Content in courses will continue to prepare candidates for effectively contributing the efforts to address these concerns. There was a concern that we were admitting students who were not prepared for our program and therefore we had issues preparing them for the health promotion workforce. We found the issue was in depth and clarity in writing and analysis, something we could not assess using our initial application process, so we changed that. Instead of reviewing 3 letters of recommendation, we ask the students to complete a analytic writing sample. Applicants have one week to complete it, and it is reviewed by 2 graduate faculty, along with the other application materials.
- (4) The M.S. in Health Promotion program is housed in the College of Health and Human Services. This is different from where the program was 8 years ago. It was housed in the College of Education and Professional Studies. The program more clearly aligns with the mission of this new college. The name of the program changed from Health Promotion and Leadership to align with the program core, as there is only one class specifically devoted to leadership.
- b. All learning goals listed in the overview are assessed using a variety of methods including assignments or exams in all 7 core courses, graduate projects, completion of the CITI training (an online training on the protection of human subjects). Meeting expectations for students means scoring an 80% or higher on the assessment. The program has a goal that 90% of students will meet or exceed expectations. Based on our most recent assessment report (AY 2021-2022): For learning goal #1: the program is meeting or exceeding expectations for 3/5 measures. For learning goal #2: the program is meeting or exceeding expectations for 4/5 measures. For learning goal #3: the program is meeting or exceeding expectations for 2/2 measures. For learning goals #4 and 5, the program is meeting or exceeding expectations for one measure, and just short on the second measure. Requiring the CITI training is new to the program, as the learning goal is fairly new, so we fell short on that measure.
- c. Major changes are in section 6a 1-4, and include renaming the program, a new college to house it, changes in course scheduling and admission processes, revisions to the curriculum, and development of second master's programs.
- d. Implementing new recruitment strategies (testimonials, videos)
Developing recruitment streams (for example, emergency response managers that need a master's to advance)
Designing new rubrics for assessment
Creating a mentorship program
Holding a research and creative activity event for graduate projects
Collecting survey data from employers in the field
Engaging with those in the field to keep abreast of necessary skills, content needed for the workforce
Assessing graduate students experience after graduation

Comments from the College Dean:

The MS in Health Promotion remains a successful program and offers flexibility by being 100% online and a rigorous curriculum that prepares students who wish to pursue a doctorate degree. Some notable revisions to the program include the smooth transition into the new College (College of Health and Human Services), the name change to align with the curriculum, and the development of an accelerated track for undergraduate students. Further, the graduate coordinator has worked with other programs to create a second master's program where students can be on a track to complete two master's degrees and count up to four classes toward both degrees. Further, the program adequately addressed students' needs through the COVID 19 by meeting students' needs in an online environment, and they stood out as leaders since the pandemic was a public health crisis. The program Chair, graduate coordinator, and faculty should be commended on their efforts to adapt to students' needs and create research opportunities for students through this time.

We recommend a decision of Program in Good Standing.

VPAA Decision:

- Program in good standing
- Program flagged for priority review
- Program enrollment suspended

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The summary above describes a program that has maximized flexibility in its offerings to assist students who are pursuing a master's degree in order to join the work force or gain entry into a doctorate or BSN degree program. The M.S. in Health Promotion has undergone multiple changes, including the streamlining of scheduled courses (all online) such that students may opt for the accelerated track by completing requirements in three semesters, and/or earn graduate credit while completing the undergraduate degree. While the relatively low number of required course credits (33 hours), combined with the flexibility of the thesis or graduate project track, allows students to prepare for the job market, the program plans to further tailor the curriculum to student feedback and employer preferences; this preparation will also entail greater attention to structured guidance on earning credit for prior learning, which should help working professionals pursue their M.S. in Health Promotion.

VPAA Explanation