2.14 DISTANCE EDUCATION OR EXECUTIVE DEGREE PROGRAMS

If the school offers distance education degree programs, these programs must a) be consistent with the mission; b) be guided by clearly articulated student learning outcomes that are rigorously evaluated; c) be subject to the same quality control processes as other degree programs; and d) provide planned and evaluated learning experiences. The school 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 learning methods and to systematically use this information to stimulate program improvements.

2.14.a Identification of all degree programs that are offered in a format other than regular, on-site course sessions. The instructional matrix may be referenced for this purpose.

The college offers three MPH concentrations fully online: Community Health, Epidemiology, and Health Services Administration.

2.14.b Description of the distance education degree programs, including the model or methods used, the rationale for offering these programs, administrative and student support services, the manner in which it monitors the academic rigor and equivalence to other degree programs, and the manner in which it evaluates the educational outcomes, as well as the format and methods.

ETSU has considerable experience offering a wide range of online academic programs (see http://www.etsu.edu/online/). This experience, and the infrastructure necessary to support it, lends value to the online MPH programs. Specifically, the university has invested in distance-education infrastructure that includes classrooms with digital video processing capability, multiple cameras, microphones, software and readily available tech support. The university offers 12 undergraduate and 29 graduate degrees completely online. The staff that supports the online infrastructure is robust and supported by online course fees. There are university resources to incentivize faculty to develop and maintain online courses, for faculty development for online training, and an infrastructure that supports quality control facilitated by college-level eLearning faculty coordinators.

**Model**

The vast majority of courses offered through the online MPH concentrations are offered synchronously via a hybrid format, where the course instructor meets with on-ground students in the classroom setting and the content is streamed to online students. Such offerings allow for real-time participation of online students, either through voice or typed communication, with the instructor and class. Online students have the flexibility of participating live or asynchronously. All students in hybrid synchronous or asynchronously courses also have access to a video archive of the class session, which is typically uploaded to the course website within one working day. The Office of eLearning supports ITV, WebEx and Adobe Connect software for web-based synchronous classrooms and meetings. Departments adopt one or more of those technologies based on their student needs. A small number of courses are offered in an asynchronous only online format via Desire 2 Learn (D2L), which is also supported through the Office of eLearning (http://www.etsu.edu/d2l/). The D2L software includes capacity to produce written course content, hypertext links to outside content, voice-over PowerPoint lectures, podcasts, online chat interactivity and asynchronous message boards. In addition, as described in Criterion 4.3, ETSU offers an eRate that significantly discounts tuition for out-of-state students enrolled in online programs. (http://www.etsu.edu/onlinehelp/student_help/erate.aspx).
**Rationale**
The purpose of the online public health programs is to help meet the needs of the public health workforce and other working professionals by providing high quality educational programming for students unable to attend on-ground offerings. The original impetus for online programming came from the Tennessee Public Health Workforce Development Consortium, a state-wide collaboration among the Tennessee Department of Health (TDH) and three Tennessee universities including ETSU. The consortium recognized that a large portion of TDH employees would be eligible for retirement in a relatively short period of time, and that the size of the state of Tennessee made on-ground training for professional development and succession planning difficult. In response to this need, the consortium prompted the universities to create online certificates (at ETSU, the University of Tennessee and the University of Memphis) and MPH concentrations in epidemiology and health services administration (at ETSU). The ETSU college of Public Health further developed the online MPH by adding the community health concentration. Though the consortium has disbanded the need for online education remains strong and today the college provides online academic courses and non-academic training to students across the state, country and world.

**Tennessee Public Health Training Center – LIFEPATH**
In 2010, the college was successful in obtaining HRSA funding to establish and develop the first and only public health training center in Tennessee. The center is named LIFEPATH, which stands for *Long-Distance Internet Facilitated Educational Program for Applied Training in Health*, and is described in detail in Criterion 3.3. It is mentioned here because of history as a platform online academic (one undergraduate and two graduate certificates, and three MPH concentrations) and dozens of non-academic, but competency-based training modules. Qualified students receive stipends to assist with cost of living incurred during their time in the program. Since it began, the center has provided 127 training programs serving 12,351 public health professionals through its non-academic training, enrolled 32 workforce members into academic public health programs, and resourced 29 student field placements in HRSA-designated Medically Underserved Areas.

**College-Level Support**
All departments in the college, with the exception of Health Sciences, contribute coursework for the online MPH program. The administration of the program resides under the associate dean for academic affairs and the MPH coordinator. The executive aide in the Office of the Dean provides staff support to the MPH coordinator who is also assigned a graduate administrative assistant. The MPH Operations Committee is charged with developing program policies and procedures and with providing operational oversight. The committee meets monthly during the academic year and is chaired by the MPH coordinator and composed of the chairs (or representative) of all 4 departments participating in the MPH program. In addition, the college Faculty Development Committee periodically offers formal instructional development training opportunities that include topics related to teaching and communicating in the online environment. Online students are advised by faculty in their respective departments via telephone and e-mail, and the chairs encourage regular communication (at least once per semester) between students and faculty advisors. The Office of Public Health Practice provides support and resources for the MPH field experience, including memoranda of understanding with field sites in other states and countries, such that no on-site residency period is required. A. Forsman serves as the college eLearning liaison. The liaisons meet two times each month during the regular semester to discuss online course and program issues. One of the primary functions of the liaisons is to provide a communication channel between each college and the Office of eLearning. The liaisons are responsible
for the development of policies and procedures to provide academic oversight of distance education initiatives and assist with online course and program planning and systematic review.

**University Support**

The Office of eLearning offers extensive faculty support including assistance and resources for developing and teaching online courses. Included are resources for faculty new to online teaching, online course building, tools and Student Assessment of Instruction, and an exhaustive range of workshops. ([http://www.etsu.edu/onlinehelp/faculty_support/teachingonline.aspx](http://www.etsu.edu/onlinehelp/faculty_support/teachingonline.aspx)). Technology workshops offer training in web-based conferencing software, D2L and multimedia classrooms. Online teaching pedagogy workshops facilitated by online faculty experts Dr. Susan Epps and Dr. Alison Barton address common challenges and best practices in designing or improving online teaching effectiveness. [http://www.etsu.edu/onlinehelp/faculty_support/workshops.aspx](http://www.etsu.edu/onlinehelp/faculty_support/workshops.aspx).

The Office of eLearning also offers a year-long Faculty Technology Leadership program for faculty interested in integrating technology into education. Faculty participating in the program are nominated annually by their chair and dean. In addition, the university regularly assesses the needs of online faculty. For example, in 2013, the Office of eLearning surveyed online faculty to gather feedback about common concerns and areas for improvement. Subsequent improvements were shared with the online faculty. The university also offers information and resources for online students including an online help desk [http://www.etsu.edu/onlinehelp/default.aspx](http://www.etsu.edu/onlinehelp/default.aspx).

**ACADEMIC RIGOR**

**Admission and Assessment**

Admission to the online programs requires the same application process and committee review as the on-ground programs. All online courses have the same requirements as on-ground courses, including the same course learning objectives, syllabi and assessment of student learning. All online courses are taught by primary or adjunct faculty who have graduate faculty status. Online students participate in the same evaluation experiences as on-ground students, i.e., end-of-semester Student Assessment of Instruction, comprehensive exam, culminating field experience, and exit and alumni surveys.

**Online Course Review**

All online courses are approved by the college and university curriculum committees and are also reviewed by the Office of eLearning both at the time of course development and periodically thereafter. The Office of eLearning has identified required components for all online offerings at ETSU and provides extensive support in course and program development. The Memorandum of Understanding for online courses is an agreement between the Office of eLearning and the faculty member and department developing the online course. The MOU encompasses two pieces, the online course review and possible compensation for the faculty member developing, revising or maintaining the course. New online faculty are encouraged to contact the Office of eLearning before they begin developing an online course for advice and instructional design assistance that will aid in the development process. As required by SACS, all ETSU online courses are required to undergo periodic reviews to ensure best practices and sound instructional design. These reviews focus on delivery methods, communication tools and online-specific information, not course content or objectives. Course reviews are completed using the MOU Scoring Rubric ([http://www.etsu.edu/onlinehelp/course_development/Requirements.aspx](http://www.etsu.edu/onlinehelp/course_development/Requirements.aspx)) on a three-year basis. The review can be conducted by the Office of eLearning or the eLearning liaison faculty member ([http://www.etsu.edu/onlinehelp/course_development/liaisons.aspx](http://www.etsu.edu/onlinehelp/course_development/liaisons.aspx)) from the developing college.
At the department level, the chair reviews the content and design of online courses at least annually. All departments in the college also have peer review of teaching policies consistent with the university expectation of annual peer review of teaching.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2.14.c Description of the processes that the school uses to verify that the student who registers in a distance education course or degree is the same student who participates in and completes the course or degree and receives the academic credit.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ETSU complies with the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) criteria for student identity verification <a href="http://www.etsu.edu/onlinehelp/policies/heoa.aspx">http://www.etsu.edu/onlinehelp/policies/heoa.aspx</a>. HEOA requires that institutions offering distance education programs have processes in place to ensure that the student registering for a course is the same student who participates in the course and receives course credit. Students admitted to the online programs are processed in the same manner as on-campus students. Each student is assigned a unique student identification number (E-number) which corresponds with a specific username for each student. E-numbers are used in all common transactions across campus (registration, accessing D2L and other ETSU systems, reporting of grades, etc.). These accounts use the Lightweight Directory Access Protocol to authenticate the user. Each student establishes their own password using the Strong Password Policy. As part of this policy, all students are required to change their password every 90 days. In addition, the ETSU email policy requires all faculty communication with students regarding ETSU business be conducted via the official ETSU email accounts which also require a secure login. Distance MPH students are required to sit for a proctored comprehensive examination at an official testing center, and are also required to give a “live” final presentation (as part of the culminating field experience) using Adobe or similar university-supported technology.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2.14.d Assessment of the extent to which this criterion is met and an analysis of the school’s strengths, weaknesses and plans relating to this criterion.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This criterion is met.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Strengths:**

1) The university and the college have strong infrastructure for delivering online content, as well as a commitment to continuous improvement and development of distance education programs.

2) The college implemented the hybrid delivery format in 2009, which allows for live and archived broadcasts and real-time interaction between distance students and the class-based instructor/students. The hybrid format significantly reduced the number of courses offered in the asynchronous format.

**Weaknesses:**

There is need for enhanced marketing of the online programs, in addition to the promotion activities undertaken by LIFEPATH, the Tennessee Public Health Training Center.

**Plans:**

1) The 2014-19 Strategic Plan calls for on-going instructional development of faculty as one of the identified strategies to continuously improve the quality of programs.

2) The college Recruitment and Retention Committee created in 2013-14 is charged with developing, implementing and evaluating a recruitment plan for the college with an increased focus on online programs.