2.5 CULMINATING EXPERIENCE

All graduate professional degree programs shall assure that each student demonstrates skills and integration of knowledge through a culminating experience.

2.5.a Identification of the culminating experience required for each professional public health degree program.

Culminating Experience for the MPH Program

The culminating experience for the MPH program is composed of a full semester field experience (internship), a final oral presentation with a faculty question and answer session, and a final written integrative report. (See Criterion 2.4.a. for policies and procedures for the field experience.) The field experience provides an opportunity for students to synthesize and apply knowledge and skills learned in the classroom and to gain practical experience in a specialized field of public health. Students complete the culminating experience in their final semester of study. To be eligible to begin their culminating experience, students must have completed their core and concentration coursework, sat for and successfully passed the MPH comprehensive exam, and advanced to candidacy status.

In concert with their faculty advisor (who serves as the instructor for the field experience course) and field preceptor, MPH students develop a set of competency-based learning objectives to be achieved during their practicum. The learning objectives also reflect the professional goals of the student. In addition, students are expected to apply public health theories and principles to the development and implementation of a special project in a selected domain of public health practice.

The faculty advisor and field preceptor engage in multiple assessments of the student’s ability to successfully achieve their field experience objectives and to integrate and apply knowledge in a professional setting. The preceptor completes both a midterm and final evaluation of the student’s performance of the defined competencies. Specifically, the preceptor rates the level of competence of the student in their discipline as well as in cross-cutting areas of public health. Students also complete a midterm and final evaluation of their field experience. Towards the completion of the field experience, the student develops an integrative written report and submits it his/her field preceptor and faculty advisor for review and evaluation. The student also gives an oral presentation to the college faculty and fellow students. The preceptor(s) is invited to the presentation frequently attends. Faculty members attending the presentation assess the student’s presentation using a set of evaluation criteria.

The student’s faculty advisor uses the report and presentation, as well as the oral question and answer session, to assess the student’s ability to synthesize knowledge applicable to the solution of public health problems. The final grade for the field experience course is based on the preceptor’s evaluation and the student’s written report and oral presentation, including the question and answer session (see Resource File for samples of student work and for preceptor evaluation forms). The MPH Field Guidelines, which is available electronically and in hard copy, provides detailed guidance regarding the content and format of the components of the culminating experience (see the Resource File and http://www.etsu.edu/cph/center_phpp/training/fieldexp/graduate.aspx).

Culminating Experience for the DrPH Program

While all DrPH students complete a field experience (which is overseen by their advisory committee and described in Criterion 2.4), the dissertation is considered their culminating experience. The dissertation comprehensively demonstrates that the doctoral candidate is capable of producing scholarly work at a level commensurate with the doctoral degree. To be eligible to start their dissertation, DrPH
students must have completed all coursework, sat for and successfully passed the DrPH comprehensive exam (including written and oral components), and advanced to candidacy status.

The student’s DrPH Dissertation Committee oversees the dissertation process and outcomes. In consultation with the committee chair, the student selects a minimum of two additional faculty members from within the university to serve on the committee. At least one of those faculty members must be from a department other than the student's home department. The student can select additional committee members to meet specific interests and research objectives. The Dissertation Committee oversees and evaluates the dissertation process from inception and prospectus defense to final defense of the completed work. With guidance by the committee, the student develops a proposal for a scholarly research project that is relevant to his/her concentration area. The proposal is written according to guidelines of the standard or alternative format as recommended by the ETSU School of Graduate Studies, or may be written according to the Public Health Service grant proposal specifications. The Institutional Review Board must approve the proposal if the research involves human subjects. The student presents and defends the proposal to the committee using established standards.

Once the dissertation committee approves the proposal, the candidate proceeds to conduct the research and write the dissertation. The process is interactive, with on-going guidance from the committee. Should a student plan to use the standard dissertation format, the final manuscript must include, at a minimum, introduction, literature review, methods, results, and discussion. In addition it will have an abstract and detailed bibliography. A student may choose to use the alternate format which includes: introduction, comprehensive literature review, three manuscripts that respond to a larger research question, and a conclusion. Each manuscript includes a targeted literature review, methods section, abstract, and bibliography. Also included are an overarching abstract and bibliography that reflect the entire body of work. These manuscripts are related and linked to a larger research question. Each manuscript must be judged by the committee to be of sufficient quality for submission for peer reviewed publication. The manuscripts are written to fit the formatting criteria of the intended journal. The manuscripts may be, but do not have to be, submitted for publication by the time of the defense. The manuscripts are the primary work of the student, and the student is first author on each manuscript.

A final oral defense is scheduled when a final draft of the dissertation is completed. The final defense begins with a student presentation, open to the public, and includes a public question and answer phase. An external faculty observer, representing the School of Graduate Studies, attends the oral defense. The public is then excluded, and the committee orally examines the candidate. Immediately following the defense, the committee meets privately to evaluate the student. A closed ballot is administered prior to discussing the candidate’s performance. The student is informed of the committee’s decision immediately following the vote. The outcome is then communicated to the DrPH coordinator and to the School of Graduate Studies. Policies and procedures for the DrPH dissertation are consistent with those of the School of Graduate Studies. The DrPh Student Handbook (see Resource File) provides detailed information about the dissertation. (See Resource File for copies of completed dissertations.)
2.5.b Assessment of the extent to which this criterion is met and an analysis of the school’s strengths, weaknesses and plans relating d to this criterion

This criterion is met.

Strengths:
1) All professional degree programs have a competency-based, integrative culminating experience.
2) The college has well established criteria for assuring the quality of the MPH culminating field experience. These include guidance material for students and for preceptors, a comprehensive process by which preceptors can assess student competence, and several internal mechanisms to assure that students are able to integrate and synthesize knowledge and to apply public health and discipline-specific concepts in a professional practice setting.
3) The dissertation represents the culminating experience for students in the DrPH program. The process of dissertating provides students with the opportunity to integrate public health theory and principles in addressing crucial public health issues, and to demonstrate research acumen and application of sound research methods.

Weaknesses:
None noted.

Plans:
None noted.