



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY FOR
THE PROGRAMME ACCREDITATION REVIEW
OF THE

Master of Public Health

University of Saskatchewan School of Public Health
Saskatoon, Canada

Accreditation Granted December 2019 to December 2025

AGENCY FOR PUBLIC HEALTH EDUCATION ACCREDITATION
VIRTUAL SITE VISIT DATES: Monday 9th to Tuesday 10th November 2020

SITE VISIT TEAM:
Professor Selena Gray (Chair)
Professor Henrique Barros
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Executive Summary

The site visit team (hereafter referred to as "the Team") would like to thank all those involved with the site visit and for the preparation of the self-evaluation documentation (SED), the Curriculum Validation process and candour of all participants during the visit. The carefully prepared and detailed documentation provided the Team with a clear understanding of the programme and a baseline from which to verify, clarify and engage in discussion and debate with various internal and external partners and stakeholders during the site visit.

Criterion I: Governance and Organisation of the Programme

The MPH Program attained legal recognition through the University of Saskatchewan Act 1995. Within Canada there is no national accreditation frameworks for public health programmes and the programme had previously achieved APHEA accreditation in 2013.

The host school in Saskatoon, has recently undergone a period of structural clarifications which had been resolved in November 2020 ensuring that the interdisciplinary public health programmes remain under a unified and independent school structure. This period of structural instability had brought around a level of uncertainty with ramifications on the strategic drive of the school and programmes. As such, the Team welcome and support the recent clarity and recommend that the school and programmes remain as an independent organisational entity as this is crucial for the ongoing success of the programme. The Team had also made note that the present stability had also been provided by the present interim Executive Director.

Criterion II: Aims and Objectives of the Public Health Programme

A clear strength of the Programme was found in how the learning and practica were aligned to the seven categories of competences outlined by the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC). The Programme was also commended to its response to learning in the present COVID-19 environment which was aided by faculty already integrating online learning. This had been further supported through the recent recruitment of the online educational specialist. During the meetings it became apparent that the programme faculty demonstrated a very healthy and evident esprit-de-corps who frequently and openly communicated between themselves.

It was not overly apparent during the site visit how the aims of each course, leading to synergy in achieving the aims of the programme nor how the progress between the courses allowed the course build to a whole and with a developed progression within it. As such, how the school collectively compose the programme was not particularly clear. The programme should consider

the review of course plans and learning objectives against the programme objectives which would naturally lean toward an overall programme wide review.

Regarding the relationships with the programme and stakeholders, the Team felt that the programme could interact and focus some attention on a more transparent flow of information from the programme to the stakeholders especially when changes occur.

It had been noted during the review that the programme is in a unique place regarding the opportunities to develop expertise in the areas of indigenous health and One Health approach. As a recommendation the programme would be urged to utilise and market further the indigenous health aspects as a unique selling point of the programme. The programme may wish to consider whether there are opportunities to maximise the profile of the One Health elements within the programme.

Criterion III: The Curriculum

During the last accreditation visit, the programme was encouraged to consider the introduction of a thesis into the programme. The interviews conveyed an overall positive response to the thesis introduction which had witnessed an increase to around 10% of students undertaking the thesis option. The Team were informed how the thesis had started to give students interests in academic research, progressing their academic career trajectory and providing a mechanism to do research. However, both students and faculty had raised concerns the thesis track was not well advertised and students had to pursue their own paths in finding out information about the track. As such it is recommended that the programme invest in clearly advertising the track to students and creating a process which allows students to clearly ascertain the information required to undertake the thesis.

The Team also viewed the establishment of the leadership course as a positive development. They felt that, due to the programme being heavily blended, there was a good access for international students as well as an ever more simplified programme delivery.

The programme clearly has a large number of electives with some being jointly run with other programmes in other departments which demonstrates positive inter-collegial working. Although the number of electives was viewed positively by students and faculty alike, due to the number, some of the electives contained small numbers of students. The programme is recommended to reflect on the balance of electives within the programme and whether elements can be integrated through core courses.

An area raised by both faculty and students was the dearth of training in qualitative methods and behavioural approaches in general. Although training opportunities were available for students within the wider University structure, the programme was recommended to reflect upon and improve access to qualitative methods and behavioural sciences within the programme.

During discussions it was stated that although international practicum placements were offered they were sometimes difficult for the programme to deliver as they required student self-financing. The Team understood this concern and recommends that the programme may wish to reflect on how they can support students wishing to undertake international placements and to what extent international placements are an important feature of the programme.

Of particular note was the practicum assignments which were commended for the extensive and detailed range of assessment. During the last accreditation visit it was recommended to review the timing of the practicum within the training framework. The team were informed that there were systemic circumstances which meant the move was rather complex. However, this year the position of the unit did move due to COVID19 and hence some of these systemic issues were being addressed as a matter of necessity. As a general recommendation, the Team would encourage the programme to continue to explore the best timings for the practicum.

Criterion IV: Students and Graduates

Academic and Pastoral care was highly appreciated by the students. Academically, students had both tutorial support as well as an academic officer who facilitates group tutoring, work sessions as well as acting as a conduit with school management. The programme organises extra tutorial sessions for certain courses on demand which was found to be very helpful by the students. For pastoral care, students requiring assistance have access to the Student Wellness Centre and the feedback received during the visit was very positive: one student had stated that the “services were phenomenal!”

With regard to career and employment opportunities, however, students and stakeholders expressed that there could be more information provided and, as such, the Team would recommend the programme try to provide more and updated information on potential employer and academic routes.

During the last accreditation site visit the programme was recommended to strengthen its connection with alumni and it was noted that the programme had begun to monitor alumni in 2014 and more recently conducted an Alumni survey in 2020 which included employment

patterns. The Team would support the programme's endeavours in this regard and recommend to continue regular monitoring / surveys / contact with the alumni.

Criterion V: Human Resources and Staffing

The Team had appreciated how the programme and school demonstrated a clear and transparent process for discussing workload in the team throughout the academic year which ensured coordination with a prescription of teaching duties.

Although there is no requirement to have teaching or pedagogical qualifications within the wider University, faculty (especially the younger faculty members) are encouraged to take pedagogical lessons from the Gwenna Moss Centre at the University. In terms of the role of the instructional designer, pedagogy has been embedded as part of the pandemic response with a view to a longer term integration of online processes. Much of this has been technical support and training which has been provided in close partnership with all the faculty. This was seen as particularly welcome and the Team recommended that the programme may wish to think about how to integrate pedagogic requirements (including online pedagogy) to ensure consistency of teaching across the faculty body and programme. The technical designer had been employed full time recently and both faculty and students had positively appreciated their role as part of the programme delivery. Although the programme had undergone a period of staff turnover and absences over the last two to three years, there was now seen to be stability in the programme.

Finally, as part of the SED evaluation, The Team had reviewed the faculty CVs which were available online. This review highlighted the diversity of the faculty as well as a wide range of nationalities and backgrounds. However, it demonstrated that the faculty did not appear particularly research active and the Team advise the Programme that the faculty and staff be supported in developing their research portfolios.

Criterion VI: Supportive Services, Budgeting and Facilities

During the meetings the Executive Director had expressed changes to the national funding stream which will continue to place challenges for the university in the future in addition to changes already in place. These saw an annual budget reduction in state support of 15% over the past 7-years which, although drastic, was better than the neighbouring province whose multi-year reduction was established at 35%. Additional budget reductions are expected.

On enquiry the vast majority of students were highly positive on the support provided by school's librarian and educational support. The Team were informed that the students have a dedicated School librarian and support from the online educational specialist supports and coordinates the transition from Blackboard to Canvas online platforms. Students had outlined varying services and support from an introduction early in the first year, information videos to having access to a live messenger chat enabling advice and feedback. Support was also provided during the COVID19 restrictions. However, although the vast majority of students had responded positively one student didn't feel particularly well informed and hence the Team would support the Programme in their efforts to ensure that all students are made familiar with the librarian and resources.

Criterion VII: Internal Quality Management

The team were introduced to a presentation of the new QMS system in place within the programme which also outlined the tasks and responsibilities involved which had brought together tools previously in use with the addition of more defined inputs. The team felt that, now that the new QMS system was in place, the programme might wish to consider using the outcomes as a basis for a programme level review.

The programme staff clearly have many stakeholder contacts and are involved as integral parts of the stakeholder community as part of their outreach. However, the stakeholders present within the meetings had expressed their preference for more formalised feedback mechanisms and suggested that the programme should consider integrating greater focus on student surveys to understand how supportive / helpful / guiding the practicum providers have been. The student feedback should then be provided by the programme to the practicum providers.

In addition, the stakeholders interviewed were unaware of the consequences of their feedback and had recommended the programme should consider a more formalised process which could make more use of stakeholders starting with feedback and programme review (goals and objectives) from a stakeholder perspective. The Team supports this recommendation.

Summary of Conclusions

Criterion I: Governance and Organisation of the Programme	
Sub – Criterion 1.1	Met
Sub – Criterion 1.2	Met
Sub – Criterion 1.3	Met
Sub – Criterion 1.4	Met
Criterion II: Aims and Objectives of the Public Health Programme	
Sub – Criterion 2.1	Met
Sub – Criterion 2.2	Met with comments
Sub – Criterion 2.3	Met
Sub – Criterion 2.4	Met
Criterion III: The Curriculum	
Sub – Criterion 3.1	Met with comments
Sub – Criterion 3.2	Met
Sub – Criterion 3.3	Met
Sub – Criterion 3.4	Met
Sub – Criterion 3.5	Met
Sub – Criterion 3.6	Met with comments
Sub – Criterion 3.7	Met
Sub – Criterion 3.8	Met
Criterion IV: Students and Graduates	
Sub – Criterion 4.1	Met
Sub – Criterion 4.2	Met
Sub – Criterion 4.3	Met
Sub – Criterion 4.4	Met
Sub – Criterion 4.5	Met
Criterion V: Human Resources and Staffing	
Sub – Criterion 5.1	Met with comments
Sub – Criterion 5.2	Met
Criterion VI: Supportive Services, Budgeting and Facilities	
Sub – Criterion 6.1	Met
Sub – Criterion 6.2	Met
Sub – Criterion 6.3	Met
Sub – Criterion 6.4	Met
Criterion VII: Internal Quality Management	
Sub – Criterion 7.1	Met with comments
Sub – Criterion 7.2	Met
Sub – Criterion 7.3	Partially Met
Sub – Criterion 7.4	Met