

10 Questions to Ask When Starting an Undergraduate Public Health Program Institutions with Graduate Education in Public Health - Richard Riegelman

1. What are you trying to achieve?

Goals range from increasing revenue to providing teaching opportunities for doctoral students, to influencing the university, to providing a “feeder” for the MPH, to building a constituency for public health etc.

2. Who are you trying to reach and how will you reach them?

The majority of interested students see themselves as pre-health professionals including pre-public health but a wide range of students including pre-law, international affairs, and engineering are increasingly interested in public health. Program structures include minors (and/or certificate programs), academic majors, professional majors (e.g. health education and environmental health), individual electives and courses that fulfill distribution requirements for general education etc. Multiple options are possible.

3. Have you tested the waters?

Undergraduate public health education has been described as “student driven”. Well taught introductory courses have been overwhelmingly popular and often have waiting lists. Gaining experience teaching undergraduates is an important aspect of planning a program.

4. What will be the structure of the curriculum?

Majors should fulfill the ASPH Essential Component Elements of an Undergraduate Major in Public Health. The core curriculum, experiential learning, and a capstone/synthesis experience are key components of most majors. The core courses for a major are generally a component of a minor as well. There is greater flexibility in designing the remaining components of the curriculum which can build on the strengths of an institution.

5. What are the finances?

The financial viability of the undergraduate public health depends on a number of variables including the flow of tuition, the size of the classes, the use of adjuncts and graduate students in teaching. These factors needed to be considered up front in designing a program.

6. What is your strategy for gaining approval?

The institution’s approval process for new minors and majors may influence the implementation strategy. It is often easier to get approval for minors than majors. The attitudes of Arts and Sciences often affect the ease of getting approval and the number of students who can enroll.

7. What are the options for working with other part of the University especially Arts and Sciences?

Options include using introductory public health courses to satisfy general -education requirements, having Arts and Sciences students take a minor in public health, collaborating with a Department in Arts and Sciences to develop specialty courses e.g. international affairs, environmental sciences, public policy etc.

8. Who will teach the courses and how will they be compensated?

Developing a strategy which is compatible with a graduate program is important. Ideally graduate and undergraduate teaching should be compensated using the same formulae and undergraduate public health teaching should be voluntary. If graduate students or adjuncts are utilized there should be very close supervision e.g. use of a full time faculty as a “lead professor”.

9. How will an undergraduate program be governed and administered?

A process that avoids a 2-class system of graduate and undergraduate education is highly desirable. Finding a balance between central and distributed authority compatible with the institution is important. Course approvals, admissions, student evaluations, student input etc. should be part of the governance process.

10. How will you handle success?

Most undergraduate programs have grown rapidly and in a short period have more students than they can handle. Options for addressing growth include placing limits on admissions, increasing class size, increasing faculty and sections etc. These decisions should be made as early in the process as possible.