2.14 Distance Education or Executive Degree Programs. If the school offers degree programs using formats or methods other than students attending regular on-site course sessions spread over a standard term, these programs must a) be consistent with the mission of the school and within the school's established areas of expertise; b) be guided by clear articulated student learning outcomes that are rigorously evaluated; c) be subject to the same quality control processes that other degree programs in the school and university are; and d) provide planned and evaluated learning experiences that take into consideration and are responsive to the characteristics and needs of adult learners. If the school offers distance education or executive degree programs, it 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. The school must have processes in place through which it establishes that the student who registers in a distance education or correspondence education course or degree is the same student who participates in and completes the course or degree and receives the academic credit.

Required Documentation[*]

2.14.a Identification of all degree programs that are offered in a format other than regular, on-site course sessions spread over a standard term, including those offered in full or in part through distance education in which the instructor and student are separated in time or place or both. The instructional matrix in Criterion 2.1.a may be referenced for this purpose.

As indicated in the Instructional Matrix, Table 2.1.a.1, the College offers the MPH degree with a concentration in Public Health Practice in an online distance education format. The first cohort of students entered this program in spring 2010. Twenty students have graduated from the program to date and 62 are currently enrolled. All graduate programs offered by the University of Florida must be approved by the Graduate School.

2.14.b Description of the distance education or executive degree programs, including an explanation of the model or methods used, the school's rationale for offering these programs, the manner in which it provides necessary administrative and student services, the manner in which it monitors the academic rigor of the programs and their equivalence (or comparability) to other degree programs offered by the school, and the manner in which it evaluates the educational outcomes, as well as the format and methods.

Model and Methods
Online students must meet all requirements for admission, matriculation and graduation as students in the campus-based MPH program. A successful applicant must have a US-equivalent bachelor's degree from a regionally accredited school, a minimum 3.0 upper division GPA, acceptable GRE scores, statement of purpose, three letters of recommendation, and TOEFL scores and WES evaluations, as needed. Students apply via the University of Florida Graduate Admissions Office and via the Schools of Public Health Application System (SOPHAS).

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[*] The College offers a distance-based Doctor of Audiology (AuD) program that is not included in this section.

Applications are reviewed in the same manner as campus applications with special attention to how the degree will assist the applicant to meet the career goals given in the personal statement. To be accepted in the program, applicants must have relevant work experience and evidence that an MPH degree in Public Health Practice is appropriate for them.

Students who have earned a terminal health-related degree, such as MD, DVM, DDS, PharmD, DO, and some PhD degrees, may enroll in the 42-credit accelerated program. All others take the 48-credit program.

The curriculum requires the five MPH core courses, at least two courses from at least two MPH concentrations, the MPH seminar course and a five-credit internship. As in the campus program, internships are developed with individual students in collaboration with the internship coordinator, the faculty advisor and the preceptor. All of the steps described under criterion 2.5 for MPH practical experiences apply to the online program. During the internship, students are required to complete a special project, which must be approved by the program, be supervised by a qualified preceptor, guided by a faculty advisor, and presented to the program prior to graduation.

Course scheduling corresponds with the UF semester system: fall, spring and summer. Courses are developed within the Sakai course management system into topical modules. Each module contains components of the course material as identified by the syllabus to develop mastery of one or more of the course objectives. These may be lectures, readings, website links, assignments, assessments, projects, and/or discussion boards. Course lectures are created as recorded audio lectures over PowerPoint presentations. Some lectures are recorded in active classroom courses, while others are prepared without a "live" audience. Students also have access to downloadable audio lecture files and printable lecture slides in a note-taking format. Guest lecturers are commonly featured within this program's courses as technology allows for guests from around the world to easily capture lectures for presentation in this format.

Courses contain robust discussion boards in a variety of formats. There are several support discussion boards for students to reach out for academic or technical assistance, to socialize with fellow online students, to inquire about projects and assessments in the course, as well as to converse with fellow classmates and instructors in topical discussion boards designed as graded assessment elements of a course. In addition, through the use of Adobe Connect technology, instructors can reach out to individuals or groups of students to conduct review sessions, answer course questions, or conduct group or individual presentations and assessments.

Textbooks and/or professional readings are required in all courses. Students have access to the electronic UF Health Science Center Library and are provided with support and instructions on how to utilize this resource in their coursework. The public health library liaison provides tutorial and resource acquisition support to online students in this program.

Course evaluations are conducted electronically in the same manner as all courses offered at the University. Course evaluation procedures are described under criterion 4.2.d.

Students must achieve a grade point average of 3.0 or better to qualify for graduation. The Public Health Practice competencies that graduates of this program are expected to achieve are posted at http://online.mph.ufl.edu/courses/mph-competencies/ and in the Resource File.

Rationale

The program was developed to provide public health academic training to working professionals in health related fields, such as physicians, nurses, veterinarians and dentists, as well as public health workers who have no formal public health training in public health. The decision to launch the program was made after results from market surveys conducted in 2004 and 2009 revealed a need and demand for such an offering. In addition, the College had initiated an online certificate, which included the five core MPH courses in 2006. Many of the individuals who completed the certificate indicated an interest in completing the MPH online. Certificate-holders make up 34% of the students in the program.

Administrative and Student Services

The director of public health professional programs and the associate director for the MPH program provide student academic counseling and monitor overall student academic progress. Each student has a plan of study; however, since the number of online course offerings is limited, this aspect of advising focuses primarily on appropriate sequencing of courses. Each student is assigned a faculty advisor as s/he is developing plans for internship and special project. Faculty advisors are currently selected by the MPH program director with regard to similarities of interests and skills. Course instructor(s) and teaching assistants monitor student progress within specific courses.

Online students are afforded an opportunity to hear presentations by public health professionals and scholars who visit campus. These recorded presentations are available via a Sakai course site and may be used to satisfy some requirements for PHC 6601 Seminar in Contemporary Public Health Issues.

The instructors in the online courses are available to our online students via a variety of communication tools. Students may email, chat, post to discussion boards, attend a live internet meeting, or request a phone meeting with the instructional team. Strong technical support is also provided through a staff of departmental employees and the UF Help Desk.

The program maintains an active website for the online MPH at: http://online.mph.ufl.edu/. The website is also the location of the Online MPH Student Handbook: http://online.mph.ufl.edu/student-information/handbook/. A copy of this handbook is in the Resource File.

Academic Rigor

Instructors of online courses are drawn from the primary MPH faculty and affiliated faculty, most of whom also teach in the campus MPH program. Affiliated faculty are selected because of their expertise and practice experience in the content of their courses. For example, the director of WellFlorida Council, Inc., the state designated local health planning council for North Central Florida, teaches Evidence-based Management of Public Health Programs on campus and online.

The assessments described under Criterion 2.7 apply to both campus and online MPH delivery formats, with the exception of the portfolio. Students in the online program have work experience, so many of the benefits of the portfolio, such as organizing a CV and selecting appropriate writing samples to submit to a potential employer, are of limited relevance to this student group. However, tracking of achievement of competencies, another component of the MPH portfolio, is important to all students. This is accomplished through the advising process in the online program.

Program Evaluation
The University of Florida is actively engaged in providing the highest quality distance learning opportunities. UF has established an Office of Teaching and Technology (http://tnt.aa.ufl.edu/), led by Associate Provost Andrew McCullough, PhD. This office provides technical training for distance learning staff in the University and oversight for all distance programs. In spring 2013, the office disseminated "UF Standards and Markers of Excellence for Teaching in Online and Blended Courses." The markers are divided into two groups, standard and exemplary, and they cover eight categories: course overview and introduction, course goals and learning objectives, assessment and measurement, instructional materials, interaction and engagement, course technology, accessibility, and course design evaluation. The MPH online program met all of the 39 standard markers and 18 of the 23 exemplary markers. The unmet markers were related to accommodations for individuals with disabilities and making learning objectives available at more refined levels, such as for each module, in addition to those at the course level. Plans to address these markers are underway. The report of the MPH online program assessment of markers of excellence is in the Resource File.

2.14.c Description of the processes that the school uses to verify that the student who registers in a distance education or correspondence education course or degree is the same student who participates in and completes the course or degree and receives academic credit.

High-stakes exams in this program are proctored by the online proctoring service, ProctorU. This company is contracted by UF to provide online proctoring and identification services for our online students. Students must present proper identification and are video and audio monitored by this service for all exams that exceed 10% of a course grade. Students take low stakes quizzes via their Sakai course site utilizing a Lock-Down Browser and limited time so that they may not access other course material or their computer during these quizzes.

Written assignments are submitted to a plagiarism checking service called TurnItIn. This service evaluates student's submissions and notifies instructors of instances where students may have plagiarized their written submissions. Online students are required to complete training in academic integrity early in the program to avoid any confusion about plagiarism and expectations about independent test-taking.

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.

This criterion is met.

Strengths:
1. The College offers an online MPH degree with a concentration in Public Health Practice, which has the same characteristics and the same level of academic rigor as the campus program.
2. High-stakes exams in this program are proctored by the online proctoring service, ProctorU, which is contracted by UF to provide online proctoring and identification services.
3. The faculty teaching online and campus courses and advising students are drawn from the primary and supporting faculty of the College.
4. The University of Florida has established an Office of Teaching and Technology, which provides oversight to UF's various distance learning endeavors.
5. The MPH program met all 39 standard markers of excellence identified by the Office of Teaching and Technology and 18 of 23 exemplary markers when they were first disseminated in spring 2013.

Weaknesses:
1. Five exemplary markers of excellence were not met during a self-assessment in spring 2013.

Plans:
1. Address the five exemplary markers of excellence that were not met in spring 2013 by working with the UF Office of Teaching and Technology to:
   - Investigate and implement opportunities for providing full accessibility to online courses for individuals with disabilities.
   - Develop instructional material on creating learning objectives for each section of a course and each assignment.