Healthy People 2020 and Education For Health
Successful Practices in Undergraduate Public Health Programs

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
New Brunswick, New Jersey

Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, Undergraduate Program in Public Health
Major, Minor, BS/MPH, BS Degree, Certificate Programs
http://policy.rutgers.edu/academics/undergrad/

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INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey was originally established as Queen’s College in 1766, making it the eighth oldest college in the nation. It became the State University of New Jersey in 1956. Today, Rutgers is a comprehensive doctoral research university, a member of the AAU. The institution currently serves more than 54,000 students at three urban campuses in Newark, New Brunswick, and Camden. The main campus in New Brunswick hosts more than 36,000 students.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

In the fall of 1976, the faculty of the Department of Urban Studies and Community Development on the New Brunswick campus launched a pre-professional bachelor of science (BS) degree in Public Health as a second major distinctly separate from the department’s existing bachelor of arts (BA) in Urban Studies. The department was then renamed the Department of Urban Studies and Community Health and five new faculty hires were dedicated to part-time teaching in the new major. A statewide needs assessment in 1985 showed a strong need for entry-level personnel for both state and local health departments. In response, the faculty formed a partnership with faculty from The University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ) to both expand the undergraduate public health major and create the New Jersey Graduate Program in Public Health, which later became the UMDNJ-School of Public Health (SPH). The two institutions continue to collaborate by sharing some faculty who teach and mentor students in both the graduate and undergraduate programs.

The Rutgers undergraduate program in public health grew over past decades to serve ever increasing numbers of traditional liberal arts students, guiding them to pre-professional public health careers. The faculty seeks to address our nation’s public health needs as recently laid out in Healthy People 2020 through improved curricular offerings. It recently expanded accessibility of the major to address the need for training public health professionals, especially those already serving as first responders or in the allied health professions.

PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

The undergraduate public health major was moved in 1992 from Livingston College, a traditional liberal arts college at Rutgers-New Brunswick, to the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, where the faculty acknowledges the historical roots between urban planning, public policy, and public health. The Bloustein School is committed to a rebirth of the public-service ethic in the United States, including good civic design in its broadest sense, encompassing housing, transportation, workforce development, public health, economic development, ecological balance, and social justice for the disadvantaged. This ethic seeks to reach to the world beyond academia and as such is a fitting home for the public health major.
The Bloustein School made two new faculty hires for public health in 2011, with those individuals receiving undergraduate teaching assignments in epidemiology, public health policy, mental health policy, and urban health. Health educators from Rutgers University Health Services, public health professionals throughout the state (e.g., local health officers, registered environmental health specialists, and others), and SPH faculty also contribute to the undergraduate public health program via contractual agreements. For example, the Bloustein School has an agreement with the SPH to issue articulated BA or BS/MPH degrees, and agreements with the State of New Jersey for certifications in long-term care administration and public health preparedness. For internship placements, the program has negotiated memoranda of agreement with state and local health departments, hospitals, and long-term care facilities, as well as multiple non-profit organizations.

CURRICULUM

The faculty seeks to prepare students both for graduate education in public health and for entry level positions in a broad spectrum of private and public health organizations. The curriculum firmly places public health in the broader context of urban planning and social policy, along with training in traditional public health disciplines such as epidemiology. Our public health majors learn about cutting-edge issues in public health and related fields, such as the influence of neighborhood and city infrastructure on public health (e.g., walkability, bike lanes, safe routes to school), geographic availability of healthy foods, environmental health, housing, and sustainability. Learning goals are taken both from the liberal arts (focusing on intellectual and communication skills) and professional school (professional development and ethics) perspectives.

To address the liberal arts focus, the public health curriculum requires two semesters each of general biology and chemistry, as well as a strong grounding in analysis and writing, including required courses in statistics, social science research methods, and professional writing. The final requirement is an experiential capstone experience (6 credits of internship), taken in the senior year, that provides the opportunity to apply, synthesize and integrate theory and knowledge to a field or research setting. To help students tie information and skills acquired earlier in the major to their fieldwork, all internship students attend bi-weekly seminars overseen by a Rutgers faculty supervisor who guides them through professional development and ethics activities such as human subjects’ research considerations, collaborative project planning, and public speaking. Because we are located in New Brunswick (the Healthcare City), proximate to New York, Trenton and Philadelphia, our students have a broad range of internship sites from which to choose. Once placed into a contractual agreement between the agency (and a field supervisor) and the university, interns become responsible for preparing a deliverable (e.g., a report or health education curriculum) for their field site. The deliverable must be presented in a public forum at the university to which faculty, fieldwork supervisors, and current students are invited.

To enhance the program’s applied focus on public health, the school has long-standing relationships with professionals in the field, some of whom serve as outstanding adjunct faculty and others as fieldwork supervisors. For example, three local Health Officers have taught Principles of Public Health (a required course) for more than a decade; the CEO of a large teaching hospital has taught Public Health Administration, an elective, for almost two decades; Mental Health Policy, another elective, is taught by a practicing mental health professional; and several additional elective courses in aging and public health are offered by professionals in long term care. All adjunct faculty hold masters degrees or higher and all regularly earn exceptional teaching evaluations.
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In a collaborative partnership between an academic department and the university’s student health services that may be unique in higher education, since 1991 the public health major has worked collaboratively with Rutgers Student Health Services to offer both academic and experiential courses in health education. Offerings from this collaboration include Principles of Health Education, Principles of Health and Wellness, Health and Social Justice, Sexual Health Advocacy, Health Program Development, Health Program Evaluation, Drugs Culture and Society, and Addictions Policy.

Other electives offered by the department include public health management and finance courses, public health law and ethics courses, a public health literature class, and several courses on environmental and occupational health. Electives acceptable for major credit but offered by other departments include courses from Biology (Biology, Society and Biomedical Issues), Economics (Health Economics), English (Scientific and Technical Writing, Writing for the Professions, Writing Grant Proposals), Environmental Science (Environment and Health, Elements of Water and Wastewater Treatment, Occupational and Community Noise Control, Air Pollution); Nutrition (Nutrition and Health); Philosophy (Current Moral and Social Issues, Medical Ethics); Psychology (Infant and Child Development, Adult Development and Aging, Health Psychology); and Sociology (Sociology of Medicine and Health Care, Social Gerontology, Sociology of Mental Illness). These courses have been accepted by the department from its inception, as a means of growing our elective offerings while faculty resources were constrained.

The tenure-track faculty regularly undertakes a review of the curriculum, determining new skill sets and knowledge areas relevant to various subfields of public health. With the specific aim of providing entry-level training in public health fields requiring licensure, the Rutgers public health major now offers certificate programs in:

- **Health Education** – covering the seven core competency areas required to sit for the national Certified Health Education Specialist (CHES) examination;
- **Addictions Prevention** – covering the course work required for the International Counseling & Reciprocity Consortium (IC&RC) Prevention Specialist certification;
- **Public Health Preparedness** – covering the course work required for public health professionals to function as first responders in crisis situations;
- **Environmental Health** – covering the course work required to sit for the New Jersey Registered Environmental Health Specialist (REHS) examination, in conjunction with Cook College Continuous Professional Education;
- **Long-term Care Management** – covering the course work required for students to sit for the NJ Nursing Home Administration examination and to prepare for careers in long-term care;
- **Health Disparities** – currently in the planning stage for 2011-12, capitalizing on faculty expertise in socioeconomic, physical, and mental health disparities, and the programs and policies to address them.

In addition to coursework and experiential learning, the Bloustein School hosts three undergraduate organizations for students interested in public health. A chapter of *Eta Sigma Gamma*, the national honor society for health education, was founded at Rutgers in 2009. That honorary has inducted an average of 30 students each year. A second student organization is the *Edward J Bloustein Public Service Association* (EJBPSA). This student-led group provides support for local soup kitchens, food banks, blood drives, and other public health-related activities. The organization averages more than 300 members each year, drawn from any major with an interest in public service. Finally, the school is the home of the
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Prospective Health Care Club, a student-led group for public health, pre-med and other students dedicated to community prevention activities. That club averages about a dozen members annually.

STUDENTS

All Rutgers undergraduates are welcome to take any public health course except for Research Methods and the 6-cr Internship with Seminar, which are reserved for majors only. Admission to and retention in the major requires a minimal GPA of 2.5, and no course with a grade of less than C may be counted towards major requirements. These guidelines result in a graduating class where more than one-third of public health majors receive the designation of honors, high honors or highest honors on their final transcripts.

In spring 2011 alone, more than 1200 students were enrolled in undergraduate public health classes at Rutgers. Of these, 350 students were declared public health majors and 98 of them were graduating seniors completing their 6-cr internship placements. The undergraduate public health program continues to grow, and the limiting factor will likely be the availability of classroom space and internship sites where students can get to the facilities without the need for personal transportation. To date, we have adjusted to classroom needs by offering night, weekend and online classes, utilizing public health professionals as adjunct faculty, and hiring additional staff to help with administration of the program. Internship placements for students who do not have access to personal transportation are reaching a saturation point. For students who can travel, excellent internship opportunities continue to present themselves.

LESSONS LEARNED

For decades the undergraduate faculty offered the public health major only for traditional four-year full-time liberal arts students. Several years ago the faculty became concerned that non-traditional students (adult learners, part-time students, and those working full-time) were not being served and voted to admit them directly as transfer students from the community colleges. This means that the school now serves both traditional liberal arts students and non-traditional students who hold an AA or AAS degree, many who have been trained as first responders (fire science, criminal justice) or in the allied health professions (dental hygiene, medical technology, radiation technology, licensed practical nursing, and others). Had these students applied for the public health major through the liberal arts colleges at the university, they would have lost many of their pre-professional training credits. By applying directly to a professional school, they can receive credit for their liberal arts courses and up to 25 credits of their pre-professional courses (considered their undergraduate minor). To serve these students, sections of required courses must be offered in the evening and on weekends, and in an asynchronous online format to provide the opportunity to study through distance learning.

As the demand for the major burgeoned, especially over the past five years, incredible stress was placed on the limited number of faculty members who could teach a variety of public health courses. Rather than limit the number of majors, the school reduced the burden on faculty by hiring appropriate support and additional instructional staff, including a full-time Undergraduate Student Services Coordinator and an Internship Coordinator.

Two non-tenure track instructors were also recently hired in an effort to standardize the three to four sections that must be offered each semester of Basic Statistical Methods (4 cr) and Research Methods (4 cr, including a computer lab). Additionally, the number of public health professionals hired as adjuncts to teach the introductory public health courses has also been increased from three to six. Thus, while
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the number of tenure-track faculty in public health has increased minimally over the past 35 years, staff support for the program and the addition of instructional resources, as well as accepting electives from other departments, have allowed the program to serve a large and increasing number of majors.

Employers report that the program has improved the skills set our graduates take to the workplace. The program has increased its variety of electives in response to student demand. Reacting to the needs set out in Healthy People 2020, faculty have set the next goal for the program as addressing health disparities, including creating courses that teach the skills to study neighborhood environments and the social determinants of health. We feel that this effort will be in the best interest of not only our students, but the public health of the nation as a whole.