

Executive Summary

In accordance with University of Victoria Policy AC1145, an Academic Program Review Team for the School of Public Health and Social Policy (PHSP) was formed with three members: Drs. Lynn Martin (external member and chair), John Garcia (external member), and Erica Woodin (internal member). At the request of the Associate Vice President Academic Planning, Dr. Nancy Wight, the program review focused on areas normally addressed in such reviews: undergraduate and graduate academic programs; scholarship and research; teaching and learning; service to the University, the profession and community; and, overall administrative structure.

The review team approached this assignment with interest and rigor, reviewing extensive documentation provided by PHSP as part of the self study and conducted a site visit with University, Faculty, and School administrative leaders; faculty and staff, students and alumni of the BA (Health and Community Services), MPH and diploma programs offered by PHSP. The site visit took place on November 8 and 9, 2018. This report is intended to be evidence-based, constructively critical and offered in a spirit of contribution to the further development of academic excellence within PHSP at the University of Victoria. Moreover, we trust this report will contribute to continuing scholarly excellence and future preparation of capable population health and social policy professionals and scientists by the School. Our major observations, suggestions, and recommendations are as follows.

Academic Excellence

PHSP and its programs have numerous strengths. PHSP has a well-articulated vision and mission, as well as strong values shared by the faculty, staff, and students. The School is grounded in solid commitments to social justice, health equity, and community-engaged/led, collaborative, and interdisciplinary work. These values clearly permeate the curriculum, teaching, and scholarly pursuits of faculty.

There is clear alignment between PHSP programs and the University's strategic plan, in particular, around application of theory to the "real world", and innovative, flexible, accessible online learning, as well as commitment to indigenization. The programs, as well as areas of specialization at the undergraduate (Ageing, Disability, Indigenous Peoples' Health, and International and Global Health and Human Development) and graduate (Indigenous Health Studies, Social Policy) levels align well with the University's Indigenous Plan and International Plan, as well as the Faculty's Strategic Research Plan.

The MPH program curriculum addresses core competencies for public health practice in Canada, which is consistent with comparable academic programs across the country. Social policy and community-based, community-engaged, and community-led aspects are stressed by PHSP faculty, and this is a strong asset that distinguishes UVic as a leader among MPH programs in Canada in this regard. The program and the faculty are well respected among peers within the National Network of Schools and Programs of Population and Public Health in Canada.

Enrollment is strong for the MPH program, an indicator of program reputation and quality. There is growth in the MPH thesis option, and there is strong faculty and student participation in the Social Dimensions of Health PhD program. (The latter was not a focus of this review).

The BA program was designed to meet human resources needs in Health and Human Services. Enrollment in the BA program appears stable. Although it has not met its original intake targets,

enrollment could be enhanced by marketing and increasing the number of articulation agreements with community colleges.

The programs and specializations of PHSP are contributing to labour force development in areas of strategic priority for the health care and public health systems. PHSP has been a leader in indigenous education, and has respectfully engaged with indigenous communities since well before the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report.

The School has strong, collaborative working relationships with the community, regional and provincial agencies. This has translated into meaningful placements and experiential learning opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students. Options for improvement are noted below.

Faculty and staff are excellent but too few in number to adequately cover all program requirements, including instruction and program administration. Recommended additions are presented below.

Distance education is a strong and key part of the UVic brand. By offering programs at a distance, these are accessible to many who may not have otherwise been able to attend UVic, including indigenous students living outside Victoria. This mode of delivery also facilitates accessibility for a wide diversity of students, including full-time students and part-time working professionals in the city, the province, and beyond. This aspect is both impressive and laudable, although some important areas of improvement are noted below.

Faculty are active, engaged scholars. PHSP is among the most productive units within the Faculty (and currently brings in half of the Faculty's research funds, including CIHR grants and other Tri-Council grants). The successful research programs of faculty are growing and support areas are noted below.

Students and alumni stressed their appreciation of the supportive learning environment created within the School by caring and responsive faculty and staff. The supportive culture was palpable during the site visit. While resources have been strained, faculty and staff should be commended for their attention to student support and success.

Challenges and recommendations

PHSP has risen to the challenge to mount high quality undergraduate and graduate programs even though faculty and staff complements were not realized as originally planned. Programs have been implemented, and solid program reputations have been achieved amongst students, alumni, and peer programs. Academic programs appear ready for growth. This has all occurred at the same time that faculty have been productive scientists with growing and mature programs of research, many enabling research time buy-outs. There is a heavy reliance on adjunct faculty and sessional instructors to teach required courses as a result. Whether this is sustainable and what resources may be mobilized to address the stress in PHSP and to ensure that programs remain viable into the future are issues needing discussion and planning. This is a main concern identified in this review.

The School currently has 8 full-time faculty (though there will be one additional retirement in December 2018 and with the research buy-outs there is an effective 6 FTEs), which is far from the originally anticipated 11 faculty needed to run the programs. There is an urgent need for at least 3 immediate hires to replace recent and planned retirements. A mid-term strategy to hire 2-3 additional tenure-track faculty is also needed to not only meet current demands, but also encourage quality, stability and

growth in both the undergraduate and graduate programs (where there is a heavy reliance on adjunct and sessional faculty to teach courses).

With respect to staff, the original plan called for a full-time Program Manager, full-time Practicum Coordinator, and two full-time Administrative Assistants. However, practicum coordination has been cut in half (i.e., 0.5 FTE Practicum Coordinator), and there is 1.5 FTE providing administrative assistance. There is an immediate need for an increase to a full-time equivalent for practicum coordination (1.0 FTE or two 0.5 FTE positions), given the practicum requirements in both the BA and MPH programs, and that the administrative workload surrounding affiliation agreements alone could be a full-time job. This increase from 0.5 to 1.0 FTE would allow development of much-needed practicum resource materials for students, field supervisors, and host organizations (e.g., practicum manual), as well as development and monitoring of a student success tracking system. Changes to practicum coordination are also needed to ensure continuity with future planned retirements. There is also need to increase administrative assistance to what was originally planned (i.e., two full-time positions) to support the demands of this active and growing unit. Some administrative work is currently being done by the Program Manager, whose time could be better spent in student engagement and program marketing/recruitment. As such, immediate increase of the second administrative assistant position from 0.5 to 1.0 FTE is needed.

With respect to academic program changes to consider, the following are identified in this report. PHSP offers unique and innovative areas of focus within their programs, but these are not well-aligned at the undergraduate and graduate levels. The School should consider the feasibility of offering the *same areas of specialization at the undergraduate and masters' levels*. Cross-listing of some of the course offerings may help to increase the feasibility of doing this (e.g. a 4th year specialization cross-listed with a graduate course). Recent and anticipated losses in the faculty complement result in loss of explicit expertise in Social Policy. The School should consider whether it wants to focus upcoming tenure-track positions in the areas of specializations offered. Given the success of the Healthy Sexuality course in attracting large numbers of interested students at the undergraduate level and the expertise of faculty in the unit, PHSP should consider offering *a new specialization in Healthy Sexualities at the undergraduate and graduate levels*. There was debate as to whether the methodological training needed to complete a masters' level thesis is sufficient. While students gain further methodological training and experience during their practicum placement (on which they base their thesis work) and by taking research-related electives, PHSP may want to consider collaborating with others on campus to offer *additional advanced graduate methods courses* to students in the MPH thesis stream. Also, consider explicitly aligning course learning outcomes to the overall program outcomes and include this mapping in *all course outlines*. Repeating the *self-evaluation/assessment of core competencies* (initially done within the introductory course) throughout the program to facilitate and promote students' continual reflection on skills development is also suggested.

There are inadequate infrastructure and supports for distance/online students. By all accounts, CourseSpaces seems to work well as an add-on for classes that are delivered on campus, but not well for delivery of distance education. Given that this School is entirely dependent on distance delivery, there is a need for PHSP to have more flexibility with the current online learning management system (CourseSpaces), or its own system. We recommend that a plan to support online education be developed by the University with the School and Faculty as active partners in this endeavor. Given the large number of students engaged, the potential for future expansion, and the reported lack of responsiveness and adequacy of central support for course development and delivery, consideration

should be given to new learning management system developments that will be tailored to the needs for future PHSP distance education courses.

Better marketing the undergraduate program could enhance enrolment in the BA program. Consideration should be given to a change in nomenclature to simply a BA in Population Health and Social Policy. Arguably, this clearly conveys the focus and may be more attractive to prospective students. Increasing the number of articulation agreements that recognize community college course block credits would remove a key barrier to admission in the BA program. Further engagement of the registrar's office in discussions about this may facilitate developments and is supported by this review.

The University (and the Faculty of Graduate Studies in particular) should consider offering Graduate/Teaching Assistantships to graduate students who are on-campus/in Victoria, regardless if they are in a thesis or course-based program. This would certainly aid both teaching and research by faculty in PHSP. With respect to the on-campus sessions, consistent with the values of the unit, we encourage PHSP to work with students (and possibly the Faculty of Graduate Studies) to minimize barriers/hardships for the limited number of students for whom this is an issue. As an example, use of interactive videoconferencing software so that students who are unable to travel are still able to fully participate (for example, use of zoom and a 360-degree camera). Travel grants might also be considered.

In closing, from all aspects of the review, we understand that senior administration, faculty, staff, students, and community partners are all fully committed to the continuing success of PHSP. During the site visit there was a sincere interest in our assessment. For these reasons, we are optimistic that this report will be of use to the University of Victoria and serve the purposes of the review.