

## **PROPOSAL TO ESTABLISH A DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH IN THE COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS AND SCIENCES**

### **Recommendation**

It is proposed that the Board of Governors establish a Department of Public Health in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, effective Fall 2019.

It is further proposed that the Board of Governors authorize the transfer of the Bachelors of Science in Public Health Program, currently assigned to the Office of the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, to the newly established Department of Public Health in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, effective Fall 2019.

### **Rationale**

As new public health challenges arise and population demographics shift globally and locally, this is a new era: one posing increasing healthcare challenges and demands with hard-to-reach and underserved vulnerable populations. In this context, it is imperative that specialists from various health professions and related academic disciplines collaborate in educational endeavors to prepare a diverse student body for public health practice and applied public health research careers. Wayne State University has had great success in preparing health professionals, social scientists, and scientists from diverse backgrounds who focus on health concerns of local and global populations. *The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS) also succeeded in launching a Bachelors of Science in Public Health Program (BSPH) at Wayne State University in 2016. We hope to build on and sustain our current successes in delivering public health education by proposing to establish an undergraduate-serving Department of Public Health in CLAS.*

*A Department of Public Health in CLAS at Wayne State University will highlight, anchor, and bolster the existing BSPH Program that already offers interdisciplinary training in local and global population health issues to students interested in a broad range of health-related careers. A Department will also be able to support the University objectives of community engagement and workforce development, because the interdisciplinary BSPH Program links students to a wide range of career pathways and varied opportunities for building core competencies within and outside of the classroom. These highly desirable core competencies include solid analytic skills, cultural competency and humility, communication and collaboration skills, community engagement, critical thinking and team work, all part and parcel of a true 21<sup>st</sup> century liberal arts and sciences higher education curriculum. The training available within this BSPH Program ultimately prepares the next generation of health care professionals and a core of local public health workers that will facilitate Wayne State's efforts to be a catalyst for change in Detroit and a champion of health equity for years to come. The BSPH Program also has the capacity to train the next generation of interdisciplinary, translational health researchers who can be instrumental in creating health policy in local and global settings. Our earliest graduates are already showing this potential.*

*The Demand for Undergraduate Public Health Programs:*

The Chronicle of Higher Education described public health as “...one of the five most rapidly growing college majors” in 2010, and that has played out across the country over the past decade (Fulcher et al., 2010, “Ready for Prime Time-Ramping Up Public Health Education,” *Community College Journal*). According to Leider et al. (2015, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4245293/>), 6,464 undergraduate public health degrees were conferred in 2012 in the U.S. Of those, 73% attended a college or university located in a city and 75% graduated from public institutions. By 2012, there were 176 institutions conferring undergraduate degrees in public health, with an average of 37 degree conferrals per institution. Those degrees became the tenth fastest growing undergraduate degrees in the U.S. because of demand and the context of the challenging global world we live in with social inequalities, trauma, and climate change among other contextual factors all impacting health outcomes, and, in turn, life chances.

**Background**

In late Fall 2015, President Wilson and Provost Winters charged Dean Wayne Raskind with launching the BSPH Program within CLAS at Wayne State. The program grew much more quickly than initially anticipated. The proposal for the major suggested an enrollment of 50 majors within the first year and 200 students by year 4. Instead, CLAS opened the major and minor to enrollment in June 2016, and we had over 70 students declare the major by the Census date in Fall 2016, in just a few short months. As of the Census date in winter 2019, 2.5 years later, there are 646 majors and 93 minors. About half of all majors identify themselves as following some sort pre-health professional track, and approximately 10% are Honors students. Students are evenly distributed across freshman, sophomore, junior and senior years. This major program caters to our high-performing students (for example, almost one quarter of Med-Direct students have chosen this major), but it is also a home for students who have struggled in other CLAS majors. The program has expanded by approximately 200 majors per year, with about 800 majors expected by fall 2019.

*We have now moved from our initial launch phase to a stabilization phase.* To stabilize and facilitate this growth, the BSPH Program needs to be anchored as a department that can provide adequate infrastructure and faculty support for the BSPH students. While we have been lucky enough to hire three contract-based full-time lecturers to teach the existing core curriculum, these three lecturers cannot cover all of our core courses. Thus, we are dependent on faculty in other departments and part-time faculty to staff our core courses as well, due to the size of our program. We are unable to hire a fulltime director or our own full-time, tenure-track/tenured faculty because the BSPH Program is a free-floating program in the Office of the Dean in CLAS and does not have access to permanent faculty or director lines. Not being able to take advantage of hiring initiatives such as the Provost’s interdisciplinary hires, and not being able to hire a fulltime Chair, inhibits our ability to manage the student demand and size of our program. A program of this size needs to be able to make use of departmental infrastructure as well as administrative and faculty support that typically exists in departmental units.

**Current Program Administration**

The BSPH Program is an undergraduate degree based in and administered by the CLAS Dean’s Office. The BSPH Program has been launched and directed primarily by Associate Dean Heather Dillaway. The program also currently benefits from the efforts of a co-director (.25 FTE) donated by the Master of Public Health program in the School of Medicine and a Practicum Director, whose

salary is currently shared by the two programs. Current BSPH academic advising is handled by two CLAS academic advisors assigned to the program. The new department will continue to collaborate with the School of Medicine and MPH program wherever possible in a manner to benefit both programs.

### **Budget/Resources**

The initial budget and resources, including the faculty line for a full-time chair, advisors and lecturers are in place within the College already, and will be moved to the newly formed department upon its creation. As the BSPH continues to exhibit stability and growth, ongoing growth of the department will be accommodated through the normal planning and budgeting processes expected of departments.

### **Impact on Curriculum**

The transfer of the BSPH Program from the CLAS Dean's Office to a new Department of Public Health in CLAS will have no immediate impact on the core curriculum. The Program is built upon core curricular requirements approved in 2015. The BSPH Program (including the existing major and minor) will be transferred to the new department. Participating faculty will continue to provide program content as currently constructed. The courses to be managed by the proposed Department of Public Health include those currently listed under the course prefix PH. The new Department will represent a more integrated, stable structure that will broaden the educational experience for students and allow us to manage and sustain curricula more effectively.

### **Impact on Students**

Students will be officially notified of the changes in departmental structure through outreach by the program's academic advisors. The reorganization will have no impact on the programs or degree designations of the students. Students will continue to follow the curriculum for their major and minor as developed in their plans of work.

### **Impact on Existing Faculty and Staff**

Associate Dean Heather Dillaway will continue as Interim Chair of the new department until a fulltime Chair is hired; a Chair search will be initiated upon approval of a new Department. The three lecturers will be transferred to the new Department, as will the Practicum and Community Engagement Coordinator and the two Academic Advisors; these employees are already employed full-time by the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences. Faculty with tenure lines in other departments and/or colleges and schools at Wayne State will continue to reside in those other units, but will be affiliated with the BSPH program.

### **Conclusion**

*The launch of the BSPH Program is a success story so far but the program is unsustainable if the administrative structure of the program is not formalized.* Establishing a Department of Public Health in CLAS has many benefits, including creating opportunity for:

- Further growth of enrollments as opposed to being forced to cap the major and minor;
- Broad exposure and access to the undergraduate major and minor;
- Providing the BSPH program adequate administrative support so that day-to-day operations are stable;

- Possibilities of formal joint appointments across many departments in CLAS as well as across colleges/schools/institutes;
- Greater opportunity and expanded infrastructure to work with other health-related units on campus.

The formation of a Department of Public Health will provide a permanent identity and anchored structure that will promote program development, enhancement, and growth and will meet the continued, increasing demand for education in this field. It will also provide a more recognizable unit for prospective students, employers, community organizations, philanthropic organizations, and both current and future faculty members.

### **Approvals**

This proposal was approved by the faculty of the BSPH Program, members of a cross-college internal advisory board for the BSPH Program, the College of Liberal Arts and Science Faculty Council and Faculty Assembly, the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Science, and the Provost.