

2.12 Distance Education or Executive Degree Programs

- 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.**

The generalist MPH degree offered by the CEOMPH is a program that uses synchronous interactive videoconferencing with web-based support in combination with online coursework in order to provide students with the ability to take core classes in a setting that is convenient to their work schedule and geographic location. A synchronous webinar format is also integrated. Approximately two out of fifteen sessions for each core course are in the traditional face-to-face format. For the remaining 13 weeks, the sessions are generally split between online coursework and interactive videoconferencing, where students sit in a classroom at the closest university campus. The summer core courses use a synchronous Adobe Connect webinar format rather than interactive videoconferencing.

- b. **Description of the distance education or executive degree programs, including an explanation of the model or methods used, the program's rationale for offering these programs, the manner in which it provides necessary administrative and student support 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 program, and the manner in which it evaluates the educational outcomes, as well as the format and methods.**

Because CEOMPH students are located all over eastern Ohio, distance technology in the form of interactive videoconferencing was used as the major mode of instruction. However, because working professionals are a major component of the student population, more flexibility is requested. Asynchronous instruction is being developed for core courses so that more physicians, nurses, and other professionals that work non-traditional hours can obtain a MPH degree.

Currently, however, CEOMPH does not offer asynchronous distance education as its *major* mode of instruction. Mostly, the program uses interactive videoconferencing in all core courses. Students may attend class at one of several classrooms available at the partner universities in Ohio: University of Akron, Cleveland State University, Ohio University, and Youngstown State University. The Adobe Connect webinar is also used for synchronous connections, for example, on poor weather days; it is also used in the summer for Public Health Concepts and Biostatistics in Public Health, along with the online and face-to-face class days. Adobe Connect has also been useful in one-on-one student presentations in the Capstone Project I course and for exit presentations for students who are connecting from a remote location or who cannot travel to where the evaluators are located.

While students are admitted to and register for classes through a "home" university, they may attend core classes at the videoconferencing site that is most convenient for them. So, for example, a student may have enrolled through The University of Akron but may choose to attend classes in Cleveland because that is the more convenient site to his/her work facility. Instructors are physically present in the same classroom with one of the groups of students.

Technical support is offered through the MPH program office and network of institution technology resources. Students often initially contact the MPH administrative assistant who helps troubleshoot the problem or contacts a technician that can help.

The program staff enjoy a good relationship with university technicians. When there are new technologies that might be of value to the program, technology specialists often share options and alternatives to current software and equipment. For example, Adobe Connect has been used for committee meetings, webinars, student presentations, and some class connections. The technical staff at The University of Akron have been very helpful to allowing our students across all universities to use their content management system, Springboard; processes to streamline access allow quick enrollment of students into MPH courses. The UA library staff facilitate copyright permissions for articles that are posted within Springboard to serve as readings and resources for courses.

The courses are evaluated in the same way as traditional courses with course evaluations on content and faculty, tracking of GPA's and satisfaction surveys. However, the students are also asked about the use of technology in the written course evaluations.

c. Description of the processes that the program 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 the academic credit.

Because the program is not exclusively online, instructors and program administrators know who the students are, starting from the first day of the program, during orientation. Pictures of each student are provided to course instructors through a class composite. Students interact in person with program faculty or staff at least a couple of times during the semester.

d. Assessment of the extent to which this criterion is met and an analysis of the program's strengths, weaknesses and plans relating to this criterion.

This criterion is met. CEOMPH is able to meet the needs of their non-traditional students through the use of distance learning technologies.

Strengths: The program uses technologies to enable professionals to connect for classes and offers assistance. However, because public health involves collaboration, elements of in person interaction are still present.

Weaknesses: Any time technology is being used, there are challenges with variability of student/faculty technical expertise or with equipment failures. In addition, as technical equipment is upgraded, issues of compatibility can arise. The program office offers first line assistance to students and faculty, and then has a network of technical staff at all of the universities to assist.

Plan: The program will continue to look for and implement the use of user-friendly technologies to make the process of learning convenient and accessible. Travel continues to be an issue for some of the students, so technology to connect students to teaching is valued.