

Demonstrating Excellence in Academic Public Health Practice

Introduction

For over a decade, the federal government and the schools of public health have been encouraging improved linkages among academic institutions and public health organizations and agencies. A major impetus for increased collaboration among these organizations was the concern stated in several documents, including the 1988 Institute of Medicine (IOM) report, that a serious disconnect existed between academic and practicing public health institutions. In response, federal agencies—in particular the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)—have provided support in the form of cooperative agreements and technical assistance to expand linkages between schools of public health and various public health practice agencies to enhance the performance of public health services.

To further develop academic-practice linkages, the Association of Schools of Public Health (ASPH) established the Council of Public Health Practice Coordinator (the Practice Council), whose members are the designated Public Health Practice Coordinators from each of the 29 accredited graduate schools of public health. The Practice Council's priority is to promote greater commitment to scholarship in public health practice-based research, teaching and service within schools of public health. Extensive integration of efforts by the Practice Council, schools of public health, federal agencies, private institutions and the practices sector have invigorated scholarship in academic public health practice.

Over the last several years, the Practice Council has developed a document called *"Demonstrating Excellence in Academic Public Health Practice."* *"Demonstrating Excellence..."* was prepared to inform and further the dialogue on the definition of academic public health practice, and on the nature of practice-based scholarship in research, teaching and service. It explores the academic role in public health practice and the role of practice in academia. It proposes a definition of academic public health practice and addresses the issue of defining, demonstrating and evaluating scholarship in terms of faculty rewards in promotion and tenure. These issues are critical to linking academia to practice, improving the relevance of public health education, advancing the competence of the public health workforce and ultimately having an impact in improving the health of the public.

The following piece is the introduction and executive summary of *"Demonstrating Excellence in Academic Public Health Practice."* Copies of *"Demonstrating Excellence..."* can either be downloaded in an Adobe Acrobat file from ASPH's web site at <http://www.asph.org/publicat.htm> or may be requested by contacting the Association of Schools of Public Health in writing: 1660 L Street NW, Suite 204, Washington, DC 20036, by phone: (202) 296-1099, or by email: info@asph.org.

Executive Summary

The field of public health, both in practice and in academia, is experiencing enormous challenges—from new epidemics to the evolving needs of infra-

structure development. Response to these challenges has occurred in every facet of public health, and has led to questions regarding the definition of public health practice, the roles of public health agencies, and the academic sector's role in public health practice. The new environment for public health requires that scholarship be redefined to include the role of practice-based research, teaching and service, and its relevance to public health practice.

This document provides a conceptual framework for furthering the dialogue concerning two vital issues confronting academic public health: its relationship to the public health workforce engaging in the practice of public health, and its scholarly mission in research, teaching and service as it relates to collaboration with the practice sector. Linkages between academia and practice have advanced the field of practice-based scholarship, applied research, teaching and service, but what are the formal criteria for evaluating this scholarship? What, in fact, is academic public health practice, how is it operationalized in schools of public health, and how will it inform the definition and evaluation of scholarship as a traditional function of academic institutions?

These questions formed the basis for deliberation by the Practice Council as they worked to complete this document. It was acknowledged that schools of public health have made substantial efforts in forming critical links with practice and community sectors, and have historically served as the professional "training ground" for public health practitioners. Institutions included here under the term "prac-

The Four Dimensions of Scholarship

(adapted from Boyer)

The scholarship of discovery

This most closely corresponds to the current definition of research, that is the generation of new knowledge. Implicit in this is the concept of knowledge for its own sake, to the freedom of inquiry within the disciplined exploration of new ideas.

The scholarship of teaching

Teaching includes the transmission of knowledge, but extends further into scholarship by creating an environment for learning by all participants in the process. Although grounded in a knowledge base, teaching utilizes both art and science to promote true intellectual understanding.

The scholarship of integration

Closely related to discovery, the scholarship of integration seeks to explore the meaning of what has been discovered by making connections across disciplines, providing context for the interpretation and synthesis of facts, and fitting research findings into larger intellectual patterns.

The scholarship of application

Extending beyond what is simply the transmission, consultation, or technical transfer of knowledge, the scholarship of application implies the dynamic, sequential interaction of methods and expertise to facilitate practice, professional, and community sectors in enhancing the development of their capacity for performing essential public health functions. In the scholarly application of theory to practice, one informs and renews the other.

Boyer, E.L. *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990.

“*tice*” organizations—federal, state and local public health agencies, academic public health institutions, health service organizations, community organizations, community and religious health coalitions, philanthropies and others—share a mission to serve the health needs of the nation.

Multi-sector linkages are crucial to assuring that communities can effectively deliver services essential to the public's health. Without academic-practice partnerships, and without standards of excellence in both the science (“discovery”) and the art (“application”) of public health practice, public health problems cannot effectively be solved. The discovery of new knowledge—traditionally the primary academic mission—is insufficient without its attendant application to enhance understanding and to improve quality of life. In fact, such application itself strengthens research and provides new models for application.

By reevaluating its role in preparing scholars to work on the future problems of public health, academic institutions will assure their relevance in the public health arena into the next century. This should include encouraging practice-based scholarship among university faculty, and revising school mission statements to reflect the imperative that leadership in academic public health practice, whether through research, teaching or service, is intrinsic to the goals of the institution. Such leadership should be firmly integrated into the organizational structure of the school.

It is the purpose of this paper to encourage public health academic institutions to reconsider the definition and scope of what constitutes scholarship, and how this relates to their mission, as reflected in their strategic objectives and reward structures. Through this process the nation's schools of public health will continue to play a significant role in discovering

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new knowledge, as well as in interpreting and applying it to enhance the practice of public health.

Academic public health practice is a new, and often misunderstood, field of scholarship that seeks to bring together two worlds: the pragmatic needs of the practitioner, and the academic quest to advance understanding. This document was written to further understanding of this new scholarship, and to promote dialogue about the roles, relationships and requirements necessary to advance scholarship in the field of academic public health practice. As used in this paper, public health practice is the strategic, organized and interdisciplinary application of knowledge, skills and competencies necessary to perform essential public health services and other activities to improve the population's health. Academic public health practice is the applied, interdisciplinary pursuit of scholarship in the field of public health. Through research, teaching and service, schools of public health and others in the public health academy carry out the mission of developing, integrating and applying new knowledge to improve public health in the population, and practice in public health agencies and in community, medical and other public health organizations.

The foundation of academic public health practice in schools of public health is the traditional academic paradigm of research, teaching and service—infused and motivated by scholar-

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Documenting and Evaluating Scholarship in Academic Public Health Practice

	<i>Scholarship of research</i>	<i>Scholarship of teaching</i>	<i>Scholarship of service</i>
Example of activity:	Needs assessment or program evaluation sponsored by a public health organization	In-service learning or practice-based courses for degree students and/or practitioners	Long-term partnership (joint venture) of school faculty with public health or community organization
Academician's role and responsibilities:	Design methodology and instruments; train personnel and supervise data collection; oversee analysis; develop study reports; recommend program changes; provide technical assistance	Define course objectives; identify and assemble texts, materials and technology/software; identify service settings; consult with mentors/trainers; assist in defining performance tasks; establish performance criteria; evaluate learning	Collaborate in defining objectives/strategic plan; contribute knowledge/skills/expertise; identify and assist in procuring needed resources; provide ongoing technical/consulting assistance; evaluate outcomes
Indicators of practice impact:	Improved assessment/evaluation methods/design; better linkages among academia and sponsoring organizations; improved program design; improved performance of core functions and essential services	Improved teaching effectiveness; improved curriculum design; improved applications of technology/software development; enhanced performance/competency of graduates and practitioners	Improved strategic/integrated plans/interventions; increased resources; better linkages with sponsor/organization/community partners; improved performance of core functions and essential services; improved health outcomes
Documentation of scholarship:	Publication in research and practice-relevant journals; practice documents; evaluation summary documents; legislative reports; technical reports/presentations; subsequent requests for technical assistance; official/practice appointments; extramural funding; honors, awards and other documented practice recognition	Course syllabi; field placement/practica records; technology/software design/demonstrations; program/curricula design documents; students'/mentors' evaluations; subsequent requests for technical assistance; extramural funding; honors, awards, and other documented practice recognition	Technical reports/presentations; formal agreements, and memoranda; policy recommendations; practice-related journal publications; practice models/guidelines; official appointments/requests; documented resource/funding acquisitions; honors, awards, and other documented practice recognition
Evaluation processes and participants:	Peer/practice/community reviewers; publications; technical reports; sponsor support/reports; legislative/regulatory action; portfolio documents	Students/peer/practitioner/community reviewers; mentor's reports; teaching documents/publications/reports; portfolio documents; evaluation of teaching on job performance	Partners' written reports and recommendations; legislative/regulatory action; publications/reports; portfolio documents

ship that includes discovery, synthesis, integration and application. Academic excellence in public health practice, furthermore, requires the same rigorously applied criteria for evaluation and peer review as does scholarship in any other field. These criteria include: clear goals, adequate preparation, appropriate

methods, significant results, effective presentation and reflective critique.

However, the defining characteristics of academic public health practice—its primary relevance as applied understanding and its inherent reliance upon interdisciplinary problem-solving—present unique chal-

lenges. Applied scholarly research, teaching and service need clearly-articulated scholarship criteria. More appropriate and inclusive forms of documentation and peer review standards should be established. Sustained recognition and support for the applied interdisciplinary scholarship of aca-

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democratic public health practice should be institutionalized both within each school and in the university.

The Council of Public Health Practice Coordinators (Practice Council) of the Association of Schools of Public Health (ASPH) therefore recommends the following specific action to deans, faculty and university administrators:

- Formally review and establish a definition of academic public health practice as it applies to research, teaching and service in schools of public health. This includes the review and, if necessary, redefinition of university policies, including changing standards that govern promotion and tenure of public health faculty to include the definition of uniform criteria for traditional and practice-based scholarship and appropriate forms of evidence from the practice community.
- Establish and enhance linkages with practice-based and community sector partners which will cement channels for interaction and increase the capacity of each to accomplish their mission.
- Assess and, if necessary, develop appropriate organizational, administrative and structural support to encourage applied, interdisciplinary scholarship in public health, with attention to practitioner appointments, faculty incentives, and practice placements. Student access to faculty and program information and appropriate admission and practice criteria also require discussion.
- Support further development and recognition of interdisciplinary forums for evidence and dissemination of scholarship within public health, including practice-based peer-reviewed journals, conferences, monographs and proceedings.
- Advocate for increased intramural

Criteria Common to All Forms of Public Health Practice Scholarship

Standard or Criterion	Applicable evidence of scholarship—research, teaching and service
Are goals and objectives clear?	Does the scholar state the basic purpose of the work clearly? Does the scholar define objectives that are realistic and achievable? Does the scholar identify important questions in the field?
Is there evidence of adequate preparation?	Does the scholar show an understanding of existing scholarship in the field? Does the scholar bring the necessary skills to the work? Does the scholar bring together the resources necessary to move the project forward?
Are methods appropriate?	Does the scholar use methods appropriate to the goals? Does the scholar apply effectively the methods selected? Does the scholar modify procedures in response to changing circumstances?
Are results significant?	Does the scholar achieve the goals? Does the scholar's work add consequentially to the field? Does the scholar's work open additional areas for further exploration?
Is scholarship effectively presented?	Does the scholar use a suitable style and effective organization to present the work? Does the scholar use the appropriate forums for communicating work to its intended audiences? Does the scholar present his or her message with clarity and integrity?
Is there evidence of reflective critique?	Does the scholar critically evaluate the work? Does the scholar bring an appropriate breadth of evidence to the critique? Does the scholar use evaluation to improve the quality of future work?

and extramural support of practice-based scholarship to include research, teaching and service.

As applied to academic institutions, there are two dimensions to nurturing excellence in public health practice: the role of schools of public health in educating the nation's public health workforce, and the role of schools in encouraging practice-based scholarship among university faculty. This document addresses these dual roles, presents a conceptual basis for formal-

izing practice-based criteria, and suggests standards for evaluating and rewarding scholars whose inquiry seeks to advance both the science and "art" of public health practice. Through such an understanding, schools of public health will serve as partners with the practice sector and the community to accomplish a larger goal—working to improve the public's health through assuring the public health infrastructure necessary to achieve the health objectives of the nation.

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