D19. Distance Education

The university provides needed support for the school, including administrative, communication, information technology and student services.

There is an ongoing effort to evaluate the academic effectiveness of the format, to assess learning methods and to systematically use this information to stimulate school improvements. Evaluation of student outcomes and of the learning model are especially important in institutions that offer distance learning but do not offer a comparable in-residence school.

1) *Identify all public health distance education degree programs and/or concentrations that offer a curriculum or course of study that can be obtained via distance education. Template Intro1 may be referenced for this purpose.*

    As indicated in the Template Intro-1, any program with the moniker "@GW" is an online program at GWSPH. This includes the following public health programs:
    -   MPH@GW, Public Health Generalist
    -   MPH@GW, Global Health
    -   MPH@GW, Health Informatics and Analytics
    -   MPH@GW, Climate and Health
    -   MPH@GW, Women, Youth and Child Health
    -   DrPH@GW, Public Health Generalist (with a residency component)

2) *Describe the public health distance education programs, including*

    a) *an explanation of the model or methods used*

        The online programs utilize a "flipped" classroom model in which students complete each weekly unit's asynchronous course content before attending a live, virtual discussion led by their instructor. All course materials and content are located in 2GW, a proprietary online learning management system (LMS) operated by our third-party partner, 2U. In summer 2023, 2U switched LMS platforms to Canvas, though it is still branded as 2GW for students.

        The online MPH@GW program operates on a quarter system with ten-week terms. Students in the online programs may take up to 15 credits of residential classes, and residential students may take up to 15 credits of online classes. Students in the MPH@GW programs could complete their entire program remotely. The quarter system also allows online students to complete a master's degree in as little as one year (accelerated timeframe).

        The core MPH courses in the residential and online programs cover the same curricular content and competencies (accounting for the difference in term length). Ensuring that our residential and online core curriculum are equivalent is an essential feature of how we have designed and maintained these programs. Many of the online electives also have residential versions with the same curricular requirements, making them interchangeable. One significant difference between online and residential programs is that no one program is available in both formats. For example, if a student is interested in concentrating in Health Informatics and Analytics, they must enroll in the MPH@GW online program and then select that concentration, as it is not available as a residential MPH.

        Students in the DrPH@GW are required to attend a three-day immersion in Washington, DC, during their first term in the program. The onsite intensive brings together students

from both the online and residential cohorts at the start of the program to promote networking and orient students to the program. Unlike the MPH@GW program, the online DrPH@GW and residential DrPH curricula and term lengths are identical. The DrPH@GW maintains the same work experience requirement, DAPEx, academic rigor and dissertation requirements as the residential DrPH.

b) *the school's rationale for offering these programs*

The original MPH@GW program (Public Health Generalist) was launched in 2013 because of a schoolwide strategic planning process. To remain competitive and ensure financial stability, distance education was considered an important and missing piece of our education portfolio. The online program also allowed GWSPH to extend our reach and thus, increase the diversity of our student population. The online student body is, on average, older and has more extensive work experience compared to the residential student body. The online program also welcomes geographically diverse students, both nationally and internationally. Last, the MPH@GW is the only generalist MPH program at GWSPH, allowing students to tailor their education to meet their career interests and goals.

Interest in our online MPH@GW program dramatically increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. Along with the increased interest in our MPH@GW program, a subset of our students also wanted the ability to specialize in certain areas of public health, much like the residential students. As a result, the Global Health, Health Informatics and Analytics, Climate and Health, and Women, Youth and Child Health concentrations were developed, with the most recent launching in 2023.

Given increasing overall trends and interest in DrPH education, GWSPH launched an online DrPH program in fall 2023. Aside from one required residential component, the remainder of the DrPH@GW program is fully online. The program expands GWSPH's online offerings and allows our MPH graduates, residential and online, an option to earn a DrPH (particularly important for graduates who enter the workforce and would like to earn a DrPH part-time). The fall 2023 launch of the DrPH@GW exceeded enrollment estimates by more than 50%. The program was open only to GWSPH graduates, and this limitation indicates the need for and interest in additional education. The program will be available to the general public for a fall 2024 start. While enrollment numbers for 2024 won't be finalized until summer 2024, applications starts and submissions on SOPHAS are again exceeding expectations.

c) *the manner in which it provides necessary administrative, information technology and student support services,*

Our partner, 2U, is a full-service organization offering admissions, LMS, marketing and recruitment services, course planning and production and technology, faculty and student support. These services are also discussed in Criteria C3, C4, C5, H1 and H4.

<u>Administrative</u>
The Assistant Dean for Academic Innovation is the lead for online program activities related to teaching and learning. In terms of business operations and administration, GWSPH also employs a Director of Operations for Academic Affairs. These two roles work in tandem to maintain the level of quality and connectivity with our outside vendor support and in close collaboration with the Senior Associate Dean for Academic, Student and Faculty Affairs, the Associate Dean for MPH Programs and the Associate Dean for Applied Public Health (as well as the MHA@GW Program Director).

Directly reporting to the Director of Operations for Academic Affairs is the Assistant Program Director for GWSPH Program Administration and a program associate, who are responsible for all aspects of course scheduling, faculty relations and administrative functions required to maintain a program of this size. The MPH@GW program is under the direction of the Associate Dean for MPH Programs. Each MPH@GW concentration is embedded within an academic department with a designated faculty member serving as concentration director. The DrPH@GW program is led by the Associate Dean for Applied Public Health and the Associate Director of Doctor of Public Health Program, who also oversee the residential DrPH. They are supported by the DrPH Program Manager.

Non-PIF faculty are provided a guide to help orient them as either a section leader or course director (see ERF > Criterion D > Criterion D19 > D19.2: PH Distance Ed).

Information Technology
2U has a dedicated staff who provide continuous training and technology support services for faculty and students. They are available via phone, email and live chat. Contact information and live chat are embedded in the 2GW LMS. Support is accessible 24/7, 365 days per year.

2U also provides expertise in online and digital pedagogy under the direction of the Assistant Dean for Academic Innovation. This includes providing one-on-one training and coaching as it relates to operating effective online synchronous sessions and related interactions with students.

The Assistant Dean for Academic Innovation works in conjunction with GW IT, LAI and GWSPH administration to identify and implement other novel educational technologies that can support teaching and learning across our residential and online programs. For example, in 2020, GWSPH adopted Panopto as the schoolwide tool for self-recording online lectures and other content for fully online, flipped classrooms and other online-enabled pedagogies.

Student Support Services
Online students attend an orientation that reviews information about campus resources available to online students, such as library resources and career and IT services. Online students complete an online *Program Guide* course in 2GW that provides additional guidance on program requirements and campus services available to online students. With the COVID-19 pandemic, many of the services offered across the university have become virtual, a change that benefits the online students.

Once students matriculate into an online program, they receive support from a student success specialist, provided by 2U, and an academic advisor from GWSPH. The role of the student success specialist is to provide answers to straightforward questions about documented policies and deadlines. The GWSPH academic advisors answer more complex questions, advise on plans of study and guide students on their APEx journeys.[87] Additional information about online academic advising is in Criterion H1.

Online students have the same access to GWSPH Career Services as residential students (see Criterion H2).

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[87] Two MPH@GW faculty members serve as practicum directors and assist online students during their APEx.

d) *the manner in which it monitors the academic rigor of the programs and their equivalence (or comparability) to other degree programs offered by the university and*

The academic rigor of online courses and programs is monitored in the same way and at the same level as that of their residential counterparts. MPH@GW students take the same core courses as residential MPH students. These courses assess the MPH foundational knowledge and competencies (likewise for DrPH@GW and DrPH courses). Students in both online and residential graduate programs are held to the same standards regarding minimum credit requirements, applied practice experiences and culminating activities.

After implementing the new CEPH guidelines to the MPH core in 2019, the GWSPH Curriculum Committee engaged in a review of online and residential core courses to ensure quality and consistency across both modalities. Residential and online programs' core curricula were reviewed at the same time after 12 to 18 months of offering the new online core alongside several dimensions including student satisfaction, student achievement of course learning objectives, comparability of student outcomes across online and residential course modalities, and, specific to online programs, a review of how the new core curriculum performed using the MPH@GW team-teach approach.

The GWSPH Curriculum Committee membership is familiar with and, in many cases, teaches in our online program offerings and can provide valuable guidance and recommendations to faculty who are directing the online versions of our core courses. Based on GWSPH Curriculum Committee guidance and review of syllabi and curricula structure, our Assistant Dean for Academic Innovation and online learning vendor, 2U, can translate these plans into successful online course offerings.

Prior to developing a new online course or converting an existing residential course to online, the Assistant Dean for Academic Innovation and the Associate Dean for MPH Programs or the Associate Dean for Applied Public Health (for DrPH courses) identify interested instructors and meet with them to develop an initial strategy and approach for bringing that course online. For courses that are being converted to the online format, meetings between instructors and residential course leads or departments provide a scaffold for the structure of the online class.

The development of an online course occurs in two phases:
- In the Strategy Phase, instructors meet with the Assistant Dean for Academic Innovation and the 2U course strategy team. During these three to six meetings, the focus is on the alignment of course content and development of assignments with appropriate learning objectives and planning of interactive content. By the end of the Strategy Phase, a preliminary syllabus is ready for review.
- During the Course Production Phase, instructors work with a production-focused 2U staffer. It usually takes six to ten meetings to plan out the individual elements of the asynchronous content. In general, a weekly unit in one of our online courses contains six to twelve video segments (5–15 minutes each). Students also engage in several course pages each week, which provide directions for either independent work or interactive elements (e.g., discussion board).

Online courses and programs undergo the same review and approval process as residential courses and programs. All newly developed courses and programs are initially reviewed at the departmental level. The department's curriculum committee is

responsible for ensuring that courses meet degree standards and further the department's mission. Academic programs undergo the same review with a focus on accreditation and university requirements and ensuring that individual course offerings support the achievement of program-wide competencies. If the online course being reviewed already has a residential version, committee members carefully review both syllabi to ensure that competencies remain the same and assignments continue to assess those competencies.

Once approved at the department level, new courses and programs are sent to the GWSPH Curriculum Committee for review. Committee members evaluate syllabi and program proposals for academic rigor. For online courses with existing residential versions, the GWSPH Curriculum Committee receives official notification from the department curriculum committee that syllabi were thoroughly reviewed and deemed analogous. No review and approval by the GWSPH Curriculum Committee is required for these preexisting courses formatted for online instruction that clearly address the same learning objectives and competencies.

End-of-term course evaluations and exit surveys are carefully monitored to ensure that students' perceptions of skills and knowledge attained are equivalent in both residential and online programs.

Many full-time faculty teach both online and residential versions of the same course, and this further maintains rigor and quality across formats. Part-time faculty who teach in both the online and residential programs also have the same levels of public health experience and qualifications. These standards are ensured by the Assistant Dean for Faculty Affairs.

e) *the manner in which it evaluates the educational outcomes, as well as the format and methods.*

Educational outcomes for the online programs are evaluated at multiple levels and in the same manner as the residential programs at both the course and program levels. In both residential and online courses, instructors evaluate student performance on activities and assessments such as papers, exams, quizzes, discussion board posts, participation in live synchronous sessions, etc. The Associate Dean for MPH Programs and the Assistant Dean for Academic Innovation convene a quarterly Community of Course Directors meeting where course leads in the online program often share feedback on student performance and student learning outcomes. This program-level faculty meeting has proved to be an invaluable program-level resource, informing faculty development and program quality improvement activities. The program leadership also regularly convenes a program-wide MPH@GW Faculty Forum where all part-time and full-time faculty are invited to discuss program quality and student learning outcomes; this meeting also informs faculty development and program quality improvement activities.

MPH@GW students complete the same end-of-term course evaluations as residential students, albeit four times per academic year in line with the quarter calendar. Results of these course evaluations are reviewed on a quarterly basis by the Associate Dean for MPH Programs and the Assistant Dean for Academic Innovation. Where needed, outreach to faculty course directors on individual adjunct session performance is made, though this is a rare occurrence. A faculty recognition program is also guided by these course evaluation data (see Criterion E3). Larger trends in student satisfaction with particular courses are also monitored, and these data are used to guide efforts around course revisions and programmatic improvements overall.

Online students must meet the same academic program requirements as residential students including, but not limited to, GPA minimum, academic integrity training, individual course grade minimums, interprofessional education, continuing education CITI training, APEx/DAPEx and culminating experience/dissertation. Academic advisors monitor student progress and confirm that students have met the requirements for graduation. Advisors alert the program director if further action (e.g., academic probation, dismissal, etc.) is required.

Like residential programs, the online programs are included in the Academic Program Review process where programs/departments undergo periodic evaluation by both internal GW colleagues and an external review committee (see Criterion E3).

3) *Describe the processes that the university uses to verify that the student who registers in a distance education course (as part of a distance-based degree) or a fully distance-based degree is the same student who participates in and completes the course or degree and receives the academic credit.*

Upon matriculation, students are assigned a GWID, an alpha-numeric identifier required to access any GW system including 2GW. Student identity is verified when a student claims their GW identity. The university also employs two-step authentication, which requires students to not only know their GWID and password, but have access to a phone for authentication approval. Students are not able to log into any GW system, including 2GW, without this double authentication.

All students, online and residential, complete the GW Academic Integrity Activity within the first two weeks of their matriculation term. The code outlines the rights and responsibilities of students, such as academic behavior violations. After reading the code, students are required to earn at least an 80% on the final quiz and submit it to the GWSPH Office of Student Records.

In addition, approximately 50% of "seat time" is conducted synchronously via web camera. All students are required to turn on their camera, which allows faculty to visually confirm student identity and attendance.

4) *If applicable, assess strengths and weaknesses related to this criterion and plans for improvement in this area.*

Strengths
- The MPH@GW is the largest MPH program at GWSPH. Enrollment further increased during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. MPH@GW continues to be an attractive option for a variety of learners interested in public health, particularly for students with families or busy work schedules. During Alum Interviews, the school's DC location was noted as being of importance to MPH@GW students. Even though the program is entirely online, students were still able to benefit from the school's location via such mechanisms as DC-based public health experts.
- The online teaching model employed by MPH@GW has been observed to be successful across a number of dimensions. Online courses are often led by a residential faculty member, who acts in the role of course director, overseeing a larger team of section instructors comprised of contingent and regular faculty with subject matter expertise in the course topics. In a handful of cases, we allowed contingent faculty with noted topical expertise and a history of successful teaching with GWSPH to act in the role of course director. The overall instructor rating for 2021–2022 was 4.6 (out of 5). Faculty report that online students are meeting program competencies at the same levels as their residential counterparts.

- In terms of faculty support and job role satisfaction, the online program model continues to demonstrate that instructors are driven by high levels of intrinsic motivation and organizational commitment. Our faculty report that this is due in part to the supportive team-teach approach led by a faculty course director and the planned infrastructure around our distance education programs. Internal research on faculty support and satisfaction has further confirmed these findings.
- Through our relationship with 2U, GWSPH is able to offer its online programs on an integrated education technology platform that consists of the Canvas LMS, Zoom meeting platform, chat, email and phone-based access to both faculty and student support specialists, and third-party teaching and grading support tools.
- The DrPH@GW program was launched in fall 2023 and exceeded all expectations for enrollment. This online program is organized slightly differently from the MPH@GW program in that the DrPH@GW students are required to meet on campus for a residential component (PUBH 8730 Washington, DC, Immersion). Additionally, the DrPH@GW operates in tandem with the residential DrPH program, so terms are 12 weeks in the fall and spring and 10 weeks in the summer (compared to four terms of 10 weeks each in the MPH@GW).

Challenges
- The size of the MPH@GW program results in logistical challenges. For example, creative solutions for IPE were needed to meet the needs of the online student body. Additional faculty were hired to ensure that all students received personalized support during their CE projects.

Future Plans
- The MPH@GW concentrations, Global Health, Health Informatics and Analytics, Climate and Health and Women, Youth and Child Health, are relatively new, and support will continue to grow with them. Additional concentrations may be offered.
- GWSPH is exploring ways to increase the volume and types of on-campus immersion experiences available to MPH@GW students. GWSPH has strong relationships with DC-area organizations, and we hope to leverage those connections for more meaningful on-campus experiences. One successful in-person immersion was held in 2022, and two more are planned for 2023–2024.