September 12, 2006

Dianne D. Horgan, PhD
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Tucson, AZ 85721

Dear Dr. Horgan:

The UA Mel and Enid Zuckerman College of Public Health (MEZCOPH) is proposing two new doctoral programs to meet our newly revised accreditation criteria. We began discussions with Jacqueline Mok in fall 2005 and submitted the “Request for Planning Authorization” paperwork for three new degree programs in April of this year. Planning authorization was approved for a PhD degree in Biostatistics and a DrPH by ABOR at their June 2006 meeting. As the next step in creating these new academic programs, we are submitting the “Request for Implementation Authorization” documents. This letter describes the background for our requests and provides additional information about these degree programs.

MEZCOPH is accredited by the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH). CEPH issued new accreditation criteria in June of 2005. One new criterion is that all accredited schools must have additional doctoral programs with students admitted as of fall 2007 (criterion 2.10 attached). MEZCOPH currently has one doctoral program—Epidemiology. It is important to understand that the new accreditation criteria demand that we have separate and distinct doctoral programs, not just a single program with separate areas of emphasis. Dean Swanson is a member of the Board of Councilors for our accrediting body and she participated in the development of these new criteria. This is an advantage for MEZCOPH, as she knows exactly what is required by these new criteria.

Our only existing PhD, Epidemiology, is the study of the patterns and etiology of diseases within populations and as such is considered one of the "basic sciences" of Public Health. It is a research-oriented degree. The PhD in Biostatistics is quantitatively-oriented and includes topics that are distinct from topics encompassed by the Epidemiology PhD. Biostatistics is focused on methodologies used to obtain and analyze data across all health fields. At the doctoral level students learn to develop new methodologies and to develop new applications for existing methods. The DrPH is a professional degree and is oriented towards leadership in public health practice, with a strong emphasis upon public health administration and policy. Both of these new degrees will ADD relevant coursework and will not subtract from the coursework available in Epidemiology.
A question that has arisen is why we are not proposing a PhD in Public Health with majors. Table I (attached) shows the PhD programs that are offered by other accredited schools of public health. As can be seen, others are largely discipline based rather than a more generic PhD in Public Health. Our experience suggests that nationwide graduates are more marketable when their PhD is in a specific focus area. Furthermore, it is quite clear to us that a single degree with areas of emphasis will not meet the new CEPH accreditation criteria.

Some might question why we are proposing a Biostatistics PhD when the Statistics GIDP has recently been approved. Many Research I universities house both a Statistics PhD and a Biostatistics PhD. They are distinct because the coursework is more theoretical in the first degree and more applied in the second. Table 2 (attached) shows the accredited schools of public health that offer Biostatistics PhD programs in addition to a Statistics PhD program (typically housed elsewhere on campus). In fact, there is more demand nationwide for Biostatistics PhD graduates than Statistics PhD graduates as evidenced by the higher salaries paid to biostatisticians. Demand far exceeds supply for Biostatistics PhDs as evidenced by a median starting salary for assistant professors of $84,000 (American Statistical Association Fall 2005 Salary Survey Results: Biostatistics and Other Biomedical Statistics Departments). Biostatisticians hired by the pharmaceutical and biotechnology industries command higher salaries, frequently starting at $100,000. PhDs in Biostatistics also are housed in some medical schools. Public Health is a better home for biostatistics, because it is considered the other "basic science" of Public Health.

The Arizona public health community is most excited about MEZCOPH’s decision to pursue a DrPH program. The DrPH differs from a PhD in Public Health in that it is more oriented towards public health practice, leadership and policy rather than research. The goal of the DrPH degree is to allow practicing public health professionals to pursue the most advanced coursework and practice degree, focused upon public health policy, leadership and program design and evaluation. Recruitment for this degree will be targeted toward those students who have an MPH or other public health oriented master’s degree and at least two years of public health experience. The DrPH students will produce a dissertation as the culminating experience of their academic work. Table 3 (attached) shows the accredited schools of public health that offer a DrPH degree.

The permanent state dollars provided to MEZCOPH in 2005 have made it possible for us to transfer 20 faculty members from non tenure-eligible to tenure-eligible lines. They joined the 11 existing tenured or tenure-eligible faculty. These faculty members will provide the major contributions to these new degree programs. Some faculty members may choose to be involved in the appropriate research oriented degree (Epidemiology PhD, Biostatistics PhD) and the DrPH.

Finally, the establishment of these programs will allow MEZCOPH to meet new accreditation criteria by the 2007 deadline. These programs will enhance our competitiveness for the best
students. Furthermore, these degrees will enable us to meet needs across the UA campus for experts in biostatistics, as well as to meet the needs across Arizona for higher-level training in a wider range of areas in public health. Equally important, these new programs will enable us to be more competitive in recruiting new faculty members as they will have access to doctoral students in their disciplines. MEZCOPH is the only accredited college of public health in a 12 state region that extends from the U.S./Mexico border to the U.S./Canada border.

We are excited about these proposed degree programs and their potential to improve the health of Arizonans and others in the Southwest. We will be pleased to answer any additional questions throughout the implementation approval process.

Sincerely,

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