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Public Health Program
Central Oregon Community College

Dear Public Health Faculty:

Thank you for taking part in Department & Program Review (DPR) this year. The DPR process reveals critical connections that link your strengths, needs, values, priorities, and plans to those of the College. Further, it supports our commitment to innovation through continual improvement. We commend your dedication to empowering our students, engaging our communities, and supporting our values.

Successes

Public Health has several areas of strength worth celebrating. First, Public Health has made good progress on previous goals, especially in developing a strong vision, brand and identity and building public health into the education pathways for Allied Health. Public Health faculty and students demonstrate their strong commitment to the program as well as true enthusiasm for public health.

On a related note, we would like to highlight the wide-ranging community partnerships you have developed that provide grant, internship, and networking opportunities for students as well as industry-driven professionalization. Your success in grant applications and use of those funds for student support and program marketing are also commendable. Another notable achievement is publishing clearly mapped transfer options for Public Health students for seven transfer institutions on the Public Health transfer options webpage.

Challenges

The review team acknowledges the range of challenges the program has identified and appreciates the candor and data-informed analysis the program brought to both the written report and our face-to-face conversation.

We heard that the most immediate, pressing challenge is one of staffing and resource allocation. Following the reduction of an adjunct position, the program is operating with limited capacity, which raises serious questions about where to focus energy and how to sustain the breadth of activity the program has tried to build. These are not easy decisions, and the review team recognizes the weight of these decisions.

The report documents a meaningful decline in overall fill rates—from 87% to 58.1% in Bend and online formats—while also noting the program's own nuanced reading of the data. AAOT-aligned online courses perform well, sometimes above 100% fill, which suggests that curriculum offerings and pathways are genuinely context-dependent. For example, CHW and PSS trainings attract stronger enrollment outside of Bend, while AAOT-aligned courses face the opposite pattern. The challenge of communicating program value to prospective

students is substantial, particularly given that current marketing infrastructure may not be well-suited to the targeted, pathway-oriented outreach this program requires.

The team also heard in our meeting that rural outreach presents its own challenges. Reaching audiences outside of Bend is complex, and the program has been operating in rural areas for only one year, a reminder that the work there is nascent and vulnerable. Related to this, the program continues to operate under constrained general fund resources, which drives its pursuit of grants to fund staffing and outreach. The review team is encouraged that the program is treating June's advisory board gathering as an opportunity for a broader summit focused on rural health programming, and we see that as a productive step toward clarifying priorities and building regional capacity in a deliberate, community-grounded way.

Goals and needs

- **Succession planning for program director.** Identify and onboard a tenure-track faculty member to cross-train as program director prior to the current director's sabbatical (Spring 2027) and planned departure (2028).

We hear the urgency here, and we understand that building an intentional leadership transition plan is important to the lasting success of the program. As Sarah works toward retirement over the next year, we encourage you to curate or create a robust set of guidance documents that indicate how the program currently operates so that when a hire is made, the faculty would have resources to move easily into the role. When the time comes to recruit, hiring as early in the season as possible would allow time for communication between the existing and new faculty members if they are open to this.

- **Clarify rural outreach priorities.** Determine whether expansion into Madras and Prineville is an institutional priority, and if so, integrate public health into those efforts through coordinated marketing and enrollment planning.

Continue working with your dean to determine where to place emphasis in order to make the greatest impact given the resources available. You have indicated a desire to find grant funding to hire an adjunct faculty member, and we continue to be supportive of that. Lacking a large staff, however, recognize that you cannot do everything and spend your energies carefully to create a meaningful and sustainable contribution where possible. Your suggestions of shared benchmarks and decision-making rubrics for faculty are an excellent idea for helping maintain a consistent direction for the program.

- **Strengthen program marketing and visibility.** Develop program-specific marketing tools (including career pathway visuals, website updates, and recruitment templates) that faculty can deploy independently within college guidelines.

Developing marketing tools that you can use independently within College guidelines is a wise approach to getting information about Public Health out to potential students. Generally, the Dean Team works with marketing and public relations in the summer to determine some priorities and goals for the coming academic year. As we do this, we will examine Public Health alongside other program needs and discuss how we can make the most of our resources. Continued alignment with Allied Health—as your program has done well—can help maximize those resources.

- **Accelerate curriculum alignment with four-year partners.** Expand AAOT and Core Education alignment beyond OSU (completed) to PSU, OIT, and WOU through structured work sessions involving articulation, including staff, faculty, and deans, rather than the current one-by-one approach.

We note and applaud your successful work with OSU. You have built valuable relationships with our colleagues there that serve as a foundation for further work. As you seek to expand alignment conversations with other institutions, we understand your desire for and see the value in a team approach to this work. Work with your dean to shape a strategic, sustainable approach that is ambitious but is also honest about everyone's capacity.

- **Increase enrollment and support completion through pathway integration and outreach.** Embed public health courses more deeply into AAOT and four-year Core Education pathways, publish clear student roadmaps to support persistence and credential attainment, and expand high school engagement through College Now.

The production of roadmaps for students in how to persist through completing a public health credential aligns well with the Education Pathways approach COCC has adopted, and we encourage continued work in this area. You indicate you would like to propose a rubric-guided approach to resource allocation decisions, and we would gladly hear your ideas. That kind of structured thinking can make a significant difference when hard choices must be made. On expanding high school engagement, we see that there is potential in this, and we encourage you to pursue it where it fits naturally. Remember that your energy and attention are finite resources that are worth protecting.

Thank you for your ongoing dedication to student success and career readiness. Together, we can build on your achievements, address the challenges ahead, and meet the evolving needs of our students.

If you have any questions or need further clarification, please reach out. We look forward to working collaboratively to enhance the quality and impact of the Public Health program.

Sincerely yours,



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