

## 2017 University Diversity Plan Accountability Report

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**Reporting Unit:** School of Public Health

**Date:** December 1, 2017

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### ABOUT SCHOOLS/COLLEGES OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Schools of public health are designed to produce practitioners via professional training (MPH, DrPH) as well as academicians and/or researchers (via MSPH and PhD degrees). Public health as a professional discipline incorporates an interdisciplinary approach to protecting populations from health threats. The Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH; [www.ceph.org](http://www.ceph.org)) accredits schools / colleges of public health. Only CEPH-accredited schools graduates are eligible to sit for the examination leading to the national certification in public health (CPH title). SPH is continuing the process of securing and retaining CEPH accreditation, with a self-report due early 2018 and a site visit scheduled for fall 2018. Accreditation is contingent upon meeting and adhering to detailed criteria, including Diversity and Cultural Competence (Accreditation Criteria, Section G1, pages 42-44; CEPH October 2016). Accredited schools/programs belong to the Association of Schools & Programs of Public Health (ASPPH; [www.aspph.org](http://www.aspph.org)).

**Texas A&M School of Public Health** (TAMSPH; <https://sph.tamhsc.edu/>) was founded in 1998 as the nation's first to focus on rural populations. TAMSPH has ranked among the top 25 Best Graduate Schools for Public Health since 2008 (US News & World Report). The SPH consists of 4 departments, 6 centers, and a satellite campus in McAllen, Texas.

### ASPIRANT PEER INSTITUTIONS & INFORMATION COLLECTION METHODS

Last year we identified the following institutions as aspirant peers, based on the following criteria: Must be 1) CEPH accredited, 2) relatively similar in size and/or mission, 3) a public institution, and 4) of equal or higher reputation and/or rank. We selected The Ohio State University College of Public Health [OSU-CPH] (<https://cph.osu.edu/>), The University of North Texas Health Science Center School of Public Health [UNTHSC-SPH] (<https://www.unthsc.edu/school-of-public-health/>), and the University of South Carolina Arnold School of Public Health [SC-ASPH] ([http://www.sc.edu/study/colleges\\_schools/public\\_health/index.php](http://www.sc.edu/study/colleges_schools/public_health/index.php)).

Informal communication took place multiple times over the past year among faculty and/or staff who are responsible for diversity and climate matters. These conversations included individuals outside of our aspirant peers as part of our efforts to enhance our understanding of challenges faced across institutions. Specific contributions are presented without the identities of individuals as a protective measure. We limit our reporting of issues to those raised in multiple settings (e.g., more than one institution) as well, both to protect those who shared the information as well as to ensure we are not reporting anomalies.

### CONTEXT / BACKGROUND FOR DIVERSITY, CLIMATE & INCLUSION EFFORTS

**Texas A&M School of Public Health** has had a Diversity and Climate Council in place for several years. In May 2016, an Associate Dean for Climate & Diversity position was created, to coordinate activities of the new Office of Cultural Competence, Diversity & Inclusion (O-CCDI). Dr. Lisako McKyer, whose expertise include public health disparities, cultural competence, fills this position with a 50% administrative appointment of her time. She represents the O-CCDI with voting privileges on the dean's Executive Committee, and the O-CCDI has autonomy from the dean's office including its own budget. The SPH Diversity & Climate Council is comprised of representatives (faculty, staff and students) from all SPH units. The council includes 14 members. O-CCDI employs a bottom up approach to fully engage and empower members of the committee in climate and equity building activities.

**The Ohio State Univ. College of Public Health (OSU-CPH)** continues to operate its diversity, climate and inclusion efforts under the direction of the CPH Diversity and Inclusion Committee. Its mission is "to create awareness of and response to issues of diversity and inclusion through education and experience." (CPH website, 2017). The committee serves in an advisory function to the college's executive committee and to the dean, and time on this committee is considered part of college-level "service." The committee is represented at the EC level via the Associate Dean for Community Outreach and Engagement. Professional Staff member Ms. Joanne Pearsol continues her role as co-chair while Dr. Dr. Marcel Yotebient becomes acclimated to the responsibilities.

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**Univ. of North Texas Health Science Center School of Public Health (UNTHSC-SPH)** does not have a diversity officer. At the Health Science Center (HSC) level, a recently established HSC Student and Inclusion Team focuses on *student* diversity issues. There is also a HSC-wide diversity-related position in their Human Resources unit. However, it appears to be focused on EOE compliance.

**Univ. of South Carolina Arnold School of Public Health (SC-ASPH)** is the only aspirant peer with a \$10 million endowment (create in 2000 by the Norman and Gerry Sue Arnold Foundation) to support their activities. The ASPH *had* an Associate Dean for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion position that is currently vacant. This position also holds a spot on the university-wide Diversity Committee, housed in the Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI).

### RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

***“Retention efforts begin the minute the contract is signed.”***

Dr. Robert Armstrong, Texas A&M University Distinguished Professor Emeritus (2006)

The SPH’s O-CCDI subscribes to the values espoused by Dr. Armstrong regarding recruitment and retention efforts. Thus we present the Recruitment and Retention sections together, as these concepts are seamlessly linked together.

#### ***Ohio State University CPH***

Updating peer institution information from the previous report, CPH’s strategic plan requires student demographics to be representative of Ohio demographics by 2017.<sup>6</sup> Since the strategic plan deadline is this, year, next year’s report will likely provide insights into how well these goals have been met. Current strategies remain a “Diversity in Public Health” photo contest used in public recruitment materials<sup>5</sup> as well as “Diversity in Health Sciences Recruitment Flipbook” which highlights specific multicultural and diversity programs for prospective students.<sup>5</sup> These strategies are in progress and do not have any reported results. The strategic plan includes strategies for resource management to fund student assistantships, fellowships, scholarships, as well as enrollment in new academic programs and better utilization of instructional technology and distance learning materials. Implementation progress varied, ranging from none to fully in place. OSUCPH engages in activities designed to improve overall climate for students as an indirect means to retain their students (described in the climate section of this report).

Similar to student efforts OSUCPH strategic plan requires faculty demographics to be representative of Ohio demographics by 2017. Last year, CPH began piloting a faculty recruitment “checklist” designed by the Diversity Committee for all faculty searches. This pilot includes innovative recruitment protocols (e.g., announcement placement, networking), language of position descriptions, etc. are some of the topics covered by the checklist. Efforts over the past year have explicitly focused on several initiatives designed to attract diverse applicants for faculty positions. Last year the university began revamping their faculty mentoring program. It is still under development.

OSUCPH’s Strategic plan includes wording specific to recruitment and retention of staff who represent “College’s efforts to achieve and sustain racially and ethnically diverse and culturally aware/sensitive faculty, staff and student populations”. The Strategic Plan continues through 2017 and no data is available on activities explicitly designed to deal with staff issues. Previously, interviewees confirmed that while a priority, little action has taken place specific to staff recruitment and retention.

#### ***University of North Texas SPH***

The UNTHSC-SPH offers graduate and certificate programs (no undergraduate). The SPH lacks school-specific initiatives or strategies because, per Dr. Marcy Paul, they are under the auspices of the HSC’s activities/initiatives. HSC-wide recruitment activities include The McNair program, and leveraging a National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD) funded Summer Multicultural Advancement Research Training (SMART) program to increase graduate student enrollment. The SMART program is also used to build graduate assistantship opportunities for under-represented minority students. Their website reveals considerable racial/ethnic minority presence among their student body. Student retention efforts are not specified for the SPH, but occur at the HSC level via participation in the Center for Diversity and International Programs and a Diversity Council, represented by Dr. Paul. The HSC-level council provides programs to enhance graduate student attainment and retention, such as short-term training for Minority Health Professional Students, mentoring and professional development, and academic partnerships.

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The UNTSPH identifies ways faculty will be able to collaborate across disciplines through support from NIMHD programs. While the SPH emphasizes diversity through hiring practices, there are no SPH-specific. The HSC-level Diversity Council coordinates seminar series in effective mentoring, diversity focused practices, sponsorship skills, and other strategic professional development practices for faculty. It also supports faculty research in health disparities and under-represented populations via funding from the Center for Health Disparities, the NIH-funded Steps Toward Academic Research (STAR) program. Finally, the HSC offers technical assistance and mentoring programs to assist professional development strategies. Faculty are able to get involved with Academic-Community Partnerships Advisory Board.

There is a lack of data specific to UNTSPH efforts to address staff diversity other than hiring practices. Further, given these are delineated at the HSC-level, it will be difficult to modify other than to develop more progressive ones at the SPH level to enhance HSC-level efforts. Staff are able to get involved with Academic-Community Partnerships Advisory Board.

### ***University of South Carolina ASPH***

The ASPH retention efforts include well-defined and coordinated strategies, including identifying and implementing best advisement practices, enhancing partnerships with campus support services, standardizing and coordinating services across departments, and engaging in continuous assessment and data-informed process improvements. The student grievances, appeals and petitions guidelines, along with information about relevant student organizations that contribute to retention efforts for students, are prominently displayed on their website. The resignation of their diversity officer has left a void in terms of leading and advocating for issues that influence diversity in recruitment and retention.

Faculty recruitment strategies include requiring all members of faculty search committees to successfully complete an affirmative action policies training, provided by university-level human resources and augmented by material from the SPH's Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (O-CCDI). The Institute for Partnerships to Eliminate Health Disparities is highlighted as a recruitment tool via leveraging their partners to help with identifying promising candidates.

Consistent with other peers, staff recruitment and retention was not been targeted. However, it is recognized as an issue requiring attention.

### ***Texas A&M SPH***

Student Recruitment & Retention: The TAMSPH has new director (appointed 2 years ago) for the Office of Student Affairs, the unit primarily responsible for undergraduate and masters-level student recruiting; Doctoral-level recruitment occurs primarily at the department level through faculty. Since establishing the O-CCDI, the following initiatives and strategies are taking place.

1. Recruitment – The O-CCDI reviews dossiers of applicants who fall below the preferred admission criteria threshold yet were admitted, AND those who met/exceeded the criteria but were rejected. This process is to identify if the current admissions protocol is biased, and to make the decision-making process and outcomes more transparent. In an effort to become more embedded in this process, Dr. McKyer became the Director of the DrPh program. Also, Dr. McKyer has been actively seeking means to improve funding for graduate students, including exploring ways to offer Graduate Diversity Fellowships or equivalents given the SPH is currently not eligible to participate (as an HSC component). The O-CCDI is working with the Office of Communications to develop a website, as well as highlighting the office on the school's webpage.
2. Retention – O-CCDI has completed two activities designed to improve students' experiences contributing to retention. First, a research study was conducted to capture the experiences of students from the African diaspora at predominantly white institutions, included perceptions of race-based discrimination and bias. In response to the findings, an International Student Orientation was incorporated into the orientation process to help students better understand and adjust to a new cultural environment. A seminar for international students on "American Culture" was offered to facilitate a smoother transition and adjustment to idiosyncrasies of US cultures. This effort supports adjustment (which is also a climate issue) so that students can focus on their academic performances. Efforts are

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underway to conduct a content analysis of dialogue of social media postings for TAMU to use to inform institutional and SPH social media interactions.

Faculty Recruitment & Retention: One department's most recent position faculty position announcement incorporated language recommended by O-CCDI. It resulted in the hiring of a racial/ethnic minority woman. The efforts to update all position announcements is in progress. In addition to providing more detail specific the department's and SPH's values and missions specific to climate, diversity and inclusion, prospective applicants are required to include a diversity statement with their packet.

Staff Recruitment & Retention: We improved on our efforts with staff recruitment and retention, making it a priority focus for the SPH Diversity & Climate Council this past year. More on this is described in the Climate & Equity section of this report.

### CLIMATE & EQUITY

The past year has been especially challenging to those charged with working on climate and equity issues at the nation's schools of public health. Indeed, we argue it has been challenging across several fronts and not limited to schools and colleges of public health. A consistent theme emerged, not only from our peers but from other institutions: The political climate since the election is among the most challenging barriers encountered to date. Explicit and implicit messages regarding race/ethnicity, sexual harassment, poverty, ethics and transparency that the nation's top leaders have expressed have been powerful and quite detrimental to climate improvement efforts. TAMSPH, as well as our peer institutions have spent considerable time and effort addressing situations encountered as result of the present sociopolitical climate. **This is and will likely remain our biggest challenge for the upcoming year.**

Despite these challenges, the TAMSPH has over this past year, made notable accomplishments designed to positively impact diversity, inclusion and climate matters. These include the following:

1. Established a Lactation Room – made available to guests and employees.
2. Safe-Space – the O-CCDI suite was designated a “safe space.” The suite's glass windows/doors to be frosted to protect the privacy of SPH constituents seeking refuge.
3. Delivered Acculturation Orientation – designed for international students who are unfamiliar with the interaction and educational “style” of US institutions of higher learning.
4. Prepared a Code of Conduct – The Office of Research in partnership with the Office of Academic Affairs, and O-CCDI wrote the document. Feedback was provided by the school-wide Diversity Council. The CoC will be presented to the entire school for official adoption in early 2018.
5. We addressed our findings from last year regarding the lack of focus on staff issues, by focusing time and effort on matters of importance to staff. A portion of the funds awarded to us last year from the VP Diversity Office have been earmarked specifically for initiatives focused on staff issues.

Maintaining an inclusive and supportive climate is a priority for TAMSPH and peer schools/colleges of public health, and is a reflection of our respective institutional priorities. While the default approach is to address climate through diversifying students, faculty and staff, there are indications that efforts are underway to improve understanding of the underlying challenges encountered by institutions' efforts to improve. While an enriched climate is likely to be an outcome of increased sociodemographic diversity, it will not be sufficient. TAMSPH's O-CCDI in partnership with the Diversity & Climate Council are actively working on disentangling these concepts in order to identify empirically-based strategies specific to climate that we can adopt. We continue our efforts to better articulate what our climate goals are, and to prepare and implement strategies purposefully directed toward addressing climate issues through a participatory strategy that engages stakeholders at all levels of the organization in climate efforts.

### REFLECTIONS & LESSONS LEARNED

Most legitimate and reputable institutions of higher learning proudly advocate for diversity and claim it as a core value. Yet, adoption and diffusion of these values appear to be inconsistent. Indeed, we learned that at SPH, we face challenges experienced by every diversity-officer/unit we communicated with - without exception - at other universities. Namely, we encounter questions and opposition on a daily basis regarding the importance of diversity and inclusion,

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particularly by those who perceive other issues faced by higher education are more worthy of time and resources. We are challenged daily by the need to convince others that diversity and inclusion are *absolutely necessary for true excellence*, and worthy of our collective attention. Without full and consistent buy-in, it takes only a few objectors to disrupt progress across multiple fronts. Each person we communicated with shared multiple examples of missed opportunities by their respective leaders to send strong messages to reinforce the importance of diversity and inclusion. All noted that the lack of responses or ineffective responses by their respective leaders worsened climate issues, and thereby making the work more difficult for diversity officers. It is disheartening to recognize how pervasive these issues are, but also encouraging to learn the barriers we face are not limited to TAMU. Importantly, it is inspiring to learn from each other and to realize that we – collectively – will make a positive difference.

The primary lesson learned from our review of peer institutions (and beyond) is that effective and sustained improvements in climate positively influences recruitment, retention, and diversity. The caveat is that effective and sustained improvements require unwavering commitment from the highest levels of administration, and unequivocal support of diversity and inclusion efforts. It requires more than merely accepting of ideas and initiatives generated by diversity officers. It requires making bold statements, exerting proactive efforts, and mustering courage to hold everyone accountable to our loftiest ideals in order achieve our goals.

While all of the individuals we communicated with at various institutions perceived they were generally supported in their efforts, NONE believed that they received such level of support consistently from school/college nor institutional administration. Indeed, despite the Texas A&M SPH having the least amount of time with a chief diversity officer in place (1 ½ years), it appears we are further ahead compared to our peers. We have a level of autonomy the others lack, as well as resources (human and financial) dedicated to the O-CCDI. Dr. McKyer's administrative appointment is at 50%. Yet, is still insufficient to accomplish all that is required to make TAMHSC-SPH a leader in the field. Indeed all contributors indicated a full-time effort is required for the work. However, Dr. McKyer's half-time effort is twice that held by persons at peer institution, where most are at 25% effort (which is grossly inadequate for the need) or worse, performed voluntarily (i.e., service, committee work). At several institutions, the burden fell on junior faculty, staff, or other individuals who perceived themselves to be highly vulnerable. TAMHSC-SPH also has a 50% effort graduate assistant to provide support to Dr. McKyer. The O-CCDI also has strong and collegial working relationships with other SPH units (Student Affairs, Academic Affairs, Office of Research, etc.), which facilitates collaborative efforts to improve diversity and climate. Importantly, the O-CCDI has representation at the dean's executive council (EC) AND functional autonomy. Being included as a core part of the dean's EC sends a value message regarding the SPH's position on climate, diversity and inclusion. While there are pockets of resistance, they are getting quieter, perhaps (we hope) in response to our persistence and consistence.

### CONCLUSION

Challenges to TAMSPH in the upcoming years continue to be student recruitment. In this area, the lack of funding opportunities or even eligibility for TAMU diversity fellowships has resulted in low enrollment of highly qualified racial/ethnic minority students who receive financial packages elsewhere that far exceed what we can provide. Thus, this area will remain a priority for the O-CCDI. Indeed, it should be a priority HSC-wide.

Structural Changes Needed To Be National Leader in Diversity. Transition remains apparent with regard to structures and strategies to address diversity, climate, inclusion and equity issues. TAMSPH continues to stand out as an example of an office that has autonomy with its own budget and staff support. Thus, we believe our structure is the gold standard for other schools of public health, and that over time the O-CCDI's effect will be fully integrated across departments and administrative units and will demonstrate even more profound changes over time. Further, the thoughtful efforts of OCCDI build a sustainable foundation for future climate and diversity efforts.