Tips for Successfully Presenting SPH/PHP Criteria D2 and D4: Dos and Don’ts for Competency Templates

Have you ever wondered how much detail site visitors are actually looking for when it comes to demonstrating how students learn and are assessed on the foundational and concentration competencies? What about the clearest way to present this information using the criteria templates? This is part one of a two-part series that we’ve put together on best practices for responding to Criteria D2 and D4 in the 2021 Accreditation Criteria for PHP/SPH.

Before you get started on filling in the criteria templates, consider these important reminders:

Course Mapping:

- For Criterion D2, ensure that competencies are mapped to core courses or required concentration courses—never to elective courses. If you map a foundational competency to a concentration course, you must ensure that all concentration offerings have an appropriate course and assessment opportunity for that competency.
- For Criterion D4, ensure that competencies are mapped to required concentration courses—never to foundational courses or electives.
- Confirm that no competencies are mapped to the applied practice experience (APE) or integrated learning experience (ILE). Remember that the APE is intended as a reinforcing, practical application of skills which students have already demonstrated competence in a course-based setting while the ILE is a demonstration of higher order integration and synthesis of multiple skills.
  - The only exception to this is if a unit conducts the APE within a course that has didactic sessions built in. In this scenario, unit must map the competency assessment to the homework assignments, not to the applied practice experience. This requires very intentional course design. Very few of our units have successfully navigated this, so if you think you might wish to do so, check in with your staff liaison!
    - For example, students take PHS 5XX: Program Planning and Evaluation. This is a “traditional” didactic course, but within the course, students complete work products for a practice partner that also satisfy all of the requirements of Criterion D5. This is different than students completing individual internship experiences that has a course title/number associated with it.
    - Or students take PHS 5XX: Leadership and Practice, in which students attend class lectures or meetings and complete homework and other assignments that are structured around the instructor’s course content, not as reflections or progress reports on individual internships.

Assessment Congruency

- Verify that your assessment opportunity matches the verb in the competency language. For example, when considering Criterion D2 competency 14 (“advocate for political, social, or economic policies and programs that will improve health in diverse populations”), the verb is “advocate.” Reviewers will expect to see assessments where students demonstrate that they could
advocate. It won’t be enough for students to reflect on the importance of advocacy or to read about advocacy efforts. This applies to Criteria D2 and D4.

Watch Out! Ands, ors, and foot notes, oh my!

- Review all competency statements (in D2, and D4) for the use of “and” and “or.” If the competency includes the word “and,” reviewers expect to see didactic preparation and assessment for ALL parts of the competency. The best example of this are MPH foundational competencies 2 and 3 that require both quantitative and qualitative skills.
  - *NB* When writing your own competencies for Criterion D4, be aware of your use of “and.” If a competency reads: “Outline the steps and procedures for the planning, implementation and evaluation of public health programs, policies, and interventions,” reviewers will expect to see an assessment in which students outline appropriate steps to plan, to implement, and to evaluate a public health policy, a program, and an intervention.
  - A common compliance concern occurs when only part of the competency is taught and assessed (e.g., students only list steps and procedures to plan a public health program but evaluation and implementation of the program is missing; additionally, there is no evidence that students can identify the steps necessary to plan, evaluate, or implement a policy and an intervention).

- Understand that reviewers take competency language very literally and will expect to see preparation and assessment related to all aspects of the competency. This is especially important for Criterion D4. Here is a good example of what we mean: “Utilize information technology tools, critical to epidemiologic data management and analysis (Access, SPSS, SAS, and GIS).” In this situation, reviewers will look to confirm that students are introduced to and assessed on their ability to use all four of those named softwares. It would not be compliant to present only preparation and assessment of GIS-based skills. If you write it, you must assess all aspects of it. These pitfalls can often be avoided by switching to “or” and using phrases such as “for example.”

- Pay attention to the footnotes we’ve added to the 2021 Criteria. The interpretation of the competencies has not changed but the Council has added its expectations to the document to help schools and programs as you plan how to prepare and assess students in the curriculum. For example, MPH Foundational Competency 10, “explain basic principles and tools of budget and resource management,” includes a footnote on page 18 of the 2021 Criteria that makes clear what the Council means by “resource management.”

Concentration Competency Best Practices

- What makes a good concentration competency?
  - Written at a level appropriate to the degree
  - Defines a scope of skill beyond the foundational knowledge and competencies in Criteria D1 and D2. You can do this in a variety of ways:
    - Deeper, more advanced level of the same skill
    - Write a competency in an area not covered at all in the foundational curriculum
  - Focus on what students can DO as a result of their didactic preparation and knowledge
• For example, “demonstrate the ability to identify the most common health behavior theories” is not as strong as “apply a health behavior theory in the development of a health promotion program” or “use the social ecological model to address a social determinant of health.”

• Run your proposed competency statements by your CEPH staff contact. We are happy to review and advise!