UNIVERSITY COUNCIL
PLANNING AND PRIORITIES COMMITTEE
NOTICE OF MOTION

PRESENTED BY: Darrell Mousseau, chair of planning and priorities

DATE OF MEETING: October 17, 2019

SUBJECT: New vision for interdisciplinary public health programming

DECISION REQUESTED: It is recommended:

That Council authorize the disestablishment of the School of Public Health on academic grounds, and upon the confirmation of Senate, recommend to the Board of Governors that it provide for the disestablishment of the school effective June 30, 2020.

PURPOSE:
With the USask Plan 2025 now in place, there is an opportunity for the original mission of SPH and the public health programs at this university to be revitalized to better align within an interdisciplinary health sciences model. We intend to find the right academic governance and administrative structure(s). The vision will take time to develop and enact.

DISCUSSION SUMMARY:
USask’s commitment to public health has evolved and matured to the point where a new academic administrative structure is needed. It has become clear that a stand-alone unit, i.e. the School of Public Health (SPH), is no longer the appropriate conduit to achieve our bold ambitions for public health programming and interdisciplinarity. Therefore, the disestablishment of SPH is recommended, but the academic programs will be maintained and strengthened. This recommendation points to the difficulties and shortcomings in establishing and implementing the school as initially envisioned, however it also speaks to the significant accomplishments made in public health programming across the campus. The College of Dentistry has interim institutional responsibility for public health programs currently housed in SPH.

SPH has been the subject of five reviews since its establishment in 2007. In 2015, interim provost, Dr. Ernie Barber, conducted a final review. It was determined at that time that a new executive director would be hired and a renewal would be attempted. It has since been determined that the school is not the appropriate structure for public health programs at USask.
Provost Tony Vannelli and a project team have led the development of this transition plan with careful consideration including financial analysis, leadership transitions, change management, analysis of previous reviews of SPH, analysis of previous closures of units on campus, and establishment of a Public Health Task Force. Extensive consultation has been conducted with USFA, individual faculty, staff, University Council and Council committees, and senior leaders.

To ensure ongoing faculty engagement, in the fall of 2018, Dr. Vannelli met with every faculty member of SPH to discuss the future of the school. Since August 1, 2019, Dr. Brothwell, interim executive director of SPH, met with every faculty and staff member of SPH to discuss their ongoing engagement in the delivery of the public health programs currently housed in SPH. Transfers of SPH faculty to their new academic homes will follow the process outlined by the USFA Collective Agreement.

Academic programs will go on uninterrupted and students will continue to be actively recruited into the public health programs currently housed in SPH. (101 students are currently enrolled in SPH programs, 26 were newly enrolled in 2019/20.)

FURTHER ACTION REQUIRED:

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ATTACHMENTS:
1. Relevant sections of *The University of Saskatchewan Act 1995*
2. Report on the new vision for public health programming
3. Letter of support from academic programs committee
Attachment 1

Relevant sections from the *University of Saskatchewan Act 1995* for the disestablishment of a school are as follows:

(61)(1)(e) The **council** may... where it considers it appropriate on academic grounds, authorize the board to provide for...

(ii) the disestablishment of any college, school, department, chair, endowed chair, or institute...

62(3) Notwithstanding any other provision of this Act, the following decisions of the Council are to be reported to senate at its next meeting and are not to be implemented until either the **senate** confirms the decision or 12 months have passed following the end of the fiscal year in which the decision was made, whichever is the earlier:... (c) a decision to authorize the disestablishment of any college, school, department, chair, institute or endowed chair.

(49)(1)(l) The **board** may... provide for the disestablishment of any college, school, department, chair, endowed chair or institute (i) if authorized by the council on academic grounds...
Attachment 2 - REPORT ON THE NEW VISION FOR PUBLIC HEALTH PROGRAMS

Executive Summary

The original vision of the School of Public Health (SPH) at the University of Saskatchewan (USask) was to be recognized locally, nationally and internationally as a leader in public health education, discovery and collaborative partnerships. Its mission was forward thinking: to engage in interdisciplinary teaching, research and practice to improve the health outcomes of the people of Saskatchewan, Canada and the world. The school’s faculty and students, in collaboration with university and community partners, [was to] build on the unique features of Saskatchewan to offer programs of teaching, learning, and research.” Unfortunately, the plans for the school’s design and infrastructure were never fully implemented to support its vision and mission and as a result the school has struggled.

The SPH will be disestablished as an academic administrative structure through appropriate governance processes with Council, Senate and Board. Upon Council’s authorization and approval of the disestablishment, confirmation will be sought from Senate. With the completion of these steps, the authorization of Council is elevated to the Board, who holds the ultimate authority to provide for the disestablishment of the school. Through this process, SPH will no longer exist as a structure, however, the university’s commitment to continue to be a centre of excellence in all areas relevant to public health will be retained in favour of a new way of delivering and enhancing public health. For this purpose, the faculty, staff and all current public health programs will be retained.

The disestablishment of the school points to the difficulties and shortcomings in establishing and implementing the school that was initially envisioned, however it also speaks to the accomplishments made in public health programming. The university has made, and will continue to make a commitment to programming in public health, but as a university, we need to keep moving forward. The university’s commitment to public health has evolved and matured to the point where we need a new mechanism to move to the next step. The school is no longer the conduit to achieve that goal.

As a university, we have the fortitude and obligation to review, analyze and make decisions to strengthen and support the success of interdisciplinary public health programs that will best advance our programming to fit the needs of our province and tap on the unique features of our campus. We will redesign the existing model and consider a new platform whereby multiple units collaborate on interdisciplinary, inter-professional, inter-college public health programs. The vision of this new platform will take time to develop and enact.

In the interim and until its final disestablishment, the SPH will go through a period of transition. The dean of the College of Dentistry, Dr. Doug Brothwell, will act as interim executive director of the school through this transition and will have institutional responsibility for the faculty, staff and programs currently housed in SPH. A Public Health Task Force has been established to recommend to the provost the appropriate interdisciplinary structure(s) and platform for the university’s public health programs going forward.
Context and Background: Establishment

The SPH was established in May 2007. The school was to draw upon a large faculty complement from across the Health Sciences to create a vibrant research community and promote innovative interdisciplinary approaches to knowledge creation, synthesis and exchange beyond what might be attained by any individual department. The school was to bring together a number of outstanding research centers and initiatives in a manner not previously possible and with greater alignment of academic strengths than any other university in Canada (School of Public Health Steering Committee, 2007).

The school’s mandate was to create a national and international centre of excellence in interdisciplinary education and research in the areas of: 1) Vaccinology and Immunotherapeutics; 2) Veterinary public health; 3) Agricultural and rural public health; 4) Aboriginal peoples’ health; and 5) Socio-behavioral health. Ultimately, six new graduate programs were established including a Masters of Public Health (MPH), an MSc in and PhD in Biostatistics, a PhD in Epidemiology, and an MSc and PhD in Vaccinology and Immunotherapeutics.

Amongst other things, the initial proposal called for the creation of a large faculty complement comprised of: new joint appointments to the school (new faculty to be recruited) with academic homes in the other existing colleges; existing faculty positions that were also to become joint appointments; associate and adjunct appointments from related departments and external agencies respectively. For example, the College of Medicine departments of Community Health and Epidemiology (CH&E), Psychiatry, and the Canadian Centre for Health and Safety in Agriculture (CCHSA).

It was anticipated that at least 15 new faculty positions would had been required to achieve the necessary complement for accreditation with the US based Council on Education for Public Health, and that those positions would be filled over a time frame of 10 years. However, the plans to approximate a large faculty complement did not come to fruition. In actuality, the school became the academic home and the appointment location, diverting from the original idea, an approach that also factored in and impacted the struggle of the school.

Reviews of the School

Since its establishment, the school has been the subject of five reviews, the last of which suggested the school’s status as a free-standing entity should be reevaluated in 2018. After significant consideration, the provost and vice-president academic determined that while it is important that we retain the programs and the faculty and staff supporting them, it is no longer feasible to maintain the school in its current form. This requires that we rethink how to carry and advance the university’s commitment to public health further, and differently.

As noted, since the establishment of SPH, it has been the subject of five formal reviews:

1. A report on facilitation around the University of Saskatchewan School of Public Health. (Thompson, 2010).
The reports contained a number of recurrent themes. In particular, the school lacked a critical mass of faculty to achieve the original vision and deliver on a robust program of collaborative research programs. There was also an inability to integrate the school and one of its main building blocks, i.e. CH&E, and that SPH had drifted away from the original mission and vision.

The leadership of the founding executive director appointed to the school placed a priority to pursue the accreditation of the program with the Council of Education for Public Health (CEPH) and worked to grow the MPH program rapidly. This growth was not commensurate with the growth of the faculty. The push for accreditation, coupled with rapid enrollment growth in the program placed significant teaching loads on the small faculty complement supporting the school. Concerns about the academic quality of the program and the student experience were raised and a number of complaints were lodged with the College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (CGPS).

Transition

In the 2016 USask School of Public Health Task Force Report (Berry et al., 2016), the recommendations laid out an eight-point action plan for how the school could address the challenges that it faced. In February of 2016 Interim Provost Ernie Barber wrote to the faculty and staff of the school to share the task force’s report, a provided a summary of findings and the list of recommendations. The first of those recommendations was that:

“The School of Public Health should remain a distinct, free-standing academic and research entity, with re-evaluation of this status within two years. If at the end of the evaluation period the School has failed to meet designated targets, it should be disbanded and programs dispersed to other units.”

In the fall of 2018 the faculty shortages that had plagued the school since its inception continued and there was no pathway for the school to achieve the large faculty complement that was critical to its success. The school also continued to operate in a precarious financial position. Taking these and other factors into consideration, Provost Anthony Vanelli proposes to dissolve the school noting that the designated targets have not been met and accentuating that the structures established to enable the school’s success did not work as it was hoped that it would.

In spite of this dissolution the programs offered by the school are important for the university and our province and will be retained as graduate programs offered through the College of Graduate and Postdoctoral studies, with institutional responsibility in the
College of Dentistry. The disestablishment of the school and the transition required to bring the process to its final conclusion will not result in any job losses for faculty or staff nor in program changes for the students.

In recognition of the outcomes and recommendations of the reviews conducted, and in acknowledgment that the structures and resources established did not enable the school’s success, the provost recommends the disestablishment of the school as an academic administrative entity. Faculty will transition to other academic homes in existing colleges, while retaining the commitment to continue their contributions to the public health programs. The programs and associated support staff will also be transitioned to a new platform that will better align and support the university’s commitment to public health within the interdisciplinary health sciences model. In the interim, and through this transition, the College of Dentistry will have institutional responsibility for the public health programs currently in the School of Public Health.

Renewal

In terms of leadership, the provost is the executive sponsor for the restructuring of interdisciplinary public health programming at USask, and is responsible for the disestablishment of the SPH. Leadership of SPH during this process and the transition stage will be provided by the dean of Dentistry as the interim executive director of SPH. The dean of Dentistry will have institutional responsibility for the programs. An advisory task force to the provost and vice-president academic was established in April 2019 to support the mid- and long-term reorganization of interdisciplinary public health programs at the university.

The mandate of the task force is to inform the strategy for the reorganization of the public health programs to ensure the ongoing and augmented success of interdisciplinarity in the health sciences at university. The goal is to avoid the creation of new barriers, and to learn from the challenges and opportunities that were presented in the last decade of the school’s operations. In addition to the internal expertise the task force will provide, external expertise and advice will also be sought from comparable institutions as well as external partners and agencies. We know for instance that the University of British Columbia, McMaster, and the University of Manitoba have put immense effort into their redesign of the integration of health sciences.

During the transition, all current and future students enrolled in public health programs will continue without interruption. All students will continue to be enrolled in CGPS, with their progress in the programs administered by the College of Dentistry. The university will continue to offer and actively recruit students into public health programs. We also know, however, that it may be difficult for faculty to recruit thesis-based graduate students during this time of uncertainty.

Current staff in the SPH supporting the programs will report to the interim executive director of SPH. SPH faculty will also report to the interim executive director of SPH until their transfers are finalized. Transfers of SPH faculty to their new academic homes will
follow the process outlined by the Collective Agreement with the University of Saskatchewan Faculty Association (USFA) and will be completed by December 2019. Updated letters of appointment documenting the details of the transfers confirming the new academic homes and ongoing commitment to the public health programs will be issued in accordance with the requirements of the USFA Collective Agreement.

During this transition stage, and until the permanent platform and structure for the public health programs is established, the interim executive director will negotiate and coordinate with the health sciences deans the contributions transferred faculty will continue to provide to the programs. The coordinated approach will also assist in determining what additional faculty support is required for the successful delivery of the public health programs. The provost will approve these agreements.

Permanent reallocation of resources to redesign and support of public health programs will follow the decisions made under TABBS/RCM for the support of interdisciplinarity at the university.

Summary

In summary, the disestablishment of SPH as an academic entity will follow the appropriate governance process with Council, Senate and Board. The university’s vision for public health programs currently in SPH remains unchanged, but will be delivered under a different structure. The short-term strategy involves moving institutional responsibility for public health programs currently under SPH to the College of Dentistry. The public health programs will continue uninterrupted. The transition plan involves aligning the faculty and staff, programs, and resources to support the new structure and platform for the administration and delivery of public health programs. No faculty or staff will lose their jobs as a result of this change.

The long-term plan for aligning current public health programs with the university’s strategic plan and vision for interdisciplinary health sciences will be developed by a task force, chaired by the provost and vice-president academic.

With the USask Plan 2025 now in place, the original bold vision and mission under which the school was initially designed can be strengthened and better realized by revisiting the structures supporting the way that public health fits and works within an interdisciplinary health sciences model.
Works Cited


School of Public Health Steering Committee. (2007, 05 9). School of Public Health: Proposal to University Council.


Thompson, L. (2010). A report on facilitation around the University of Saskatchewan School of Public Health. Laurence Thompson Strategic Consulting.
MEMORANDUM

TO: Tony Vannelli, Provost and Vice-President Academic
    Darrell Mousseau, Chair, Planning and Priorities Committee

Cc: Jacquie Thomarat, Associate Secretary, Academic Governance

FROM: Ryan Brook, vice-chair, academic programs committee of Council

DATE: October 3, 2019

RE: Disestablishment of the School of Public Health

Thank you, Dr. Vannelli, for attending the academic programs committee on October 2, 2019 to discuss the proposed disestablishment of the School of Public Health. The committee appreciates the opportunity to review the proposal and to provide input.

The committee was pleased to hear that the academic programs will be maintained and appreciated the efforts that will be made to strengthen the existing programs and to build better links to undergraduate programming across the university. A discussion occurred about program accreditation, both now and going forward. The committee is hopeful that the ultimate goal of the Master of Public Health program achieving North American accreditation is realized with the new anticipated administrative structure that will support the academic program and was pleased to hear that work is currently underway to ensure the program maintains its current accreditation.

Members at the committee asked if there were any concerns about the optics of the disestablishment, given some of the history surrounding the School of Public Health. Your frank answer about the need for a change in delivery model to better serve the academic programs was well received by committee members.

The committee urges all those involved with this disestablishment to ensure that students currently enrolled in academic programs offered through the School of Public Health are kept informed of changes and that the quality of their programs and the value of their degrees are maintained throughout this change. The committee recognizes the amount of consultation that has already occurred on this point.

The academic programs committee is supportive of this disestablishment and, again, is pleased that the academic programs are being maintained.