

**External Review Report**

**Lehman College, The City University of New York**

Department of Health Sciences

Health Education and Promotion Program

Academic Year 2021-2022 Academic Review

May 30, 2022

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Lehman College is a public institution in the city of New York, and is a part of the City University of New York (CUNY) system. Located in the Bronx, NY, it is an urban campus providing opportunity and economic stability for its students as well as the residents of the Bronx. The Health Education and Promotion (HEA) Program is part of the Department of Health Sciences and offers the following degrees:

- Bachelor of Science (BS) in Health Education and Promotion (HEA)
- Master of Arts (MA) (Online)
- Health Pre K-12 Teacher Master of Science in Education (MS Ed) (online)
- Health Education Advanced Certificate (online).

This is a review of the Health Education and Promotion Program which was founded in 1970. There are three full time faculty to support the program.

## **A. MISSION AND GOALS**

### **I. Mission Statement**

“Lehman College, an urban public institution and economic and cultural catalyst in the Bronx, is a national engine for social mobility and a vibrant center of discovery and creative work, providing a transformative educational experience while advancing equity, inclusion, and social justice.” (The Mission, Vision, and Values of Lehman College May 25, 2022).

Like the Lehman College’s mission, the BS in HEA “embodies Lehman’s mission of a transformative educational experience and improved social mobility by preparing its students for dynamic careers in community health education.” (Self-Study Report, January 2022).

The mission statements of both the institution and the program are embedded in the ideals of helping to transform the lives of those who attend as well as improving the lives of the residents in the community. In addition, the stated goal “to equip HEA graduates with academic and field-based training” indicates a commitment to hands-on practical tools that alumni could depend on for upward mobility. The knowledge of this pledge permeated every discussion and conversation I observed during my site visit – a commitment to students to attain the knowledge and skill-set to improve their lives.

### **II. Goals**

After reviewing the self-study and participating in the site visit, the dedication from everyone associated with the program was inspiring. From the Dean and Associate Dean, the fulltime faculty, adjunct faculty to the students and alumni, everyone was upbeat and supportive of the program. On the administrative level, the provost expressed his full support for HEA, though he was concerned with the overall effectiveness of this and other programs, as well as the entire College.

The HEA at Lehman is a very good program that has the potential to become an outstanding or excellent program. This standard would be readily recognizable by other disciplinary experts in the field who are external to the institution. In fact, in many such reviews, Lehman College does very well and sometimes even outstanding, for various programs when compared with top-tier liberal arts colleges or universities.

## **B. CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION**

### **I. General**

Currently (Fall of 2021) there are two thousand students (2,000) enrolled in the department of Health Sciences, three hundred seventy-five (375) of which are in the Health Education and Promotion program. In 2021, one hundred forty-four (144) students graduated from the HEA program. Among those were seventy-three (73) HEA BS graduates, (29) twenty-nine were HEA online Master of Arts (MA) recipients, twelve (12) were attaining their Health Pre K-12 Teacher Master of Science in Education (MS Ed), Health teacher credential, and thirty (30) received their advanced certificates in Health Education. Four years prior, in the year 2017, there were two hundred thirty-three (233) students enrolled in the program, one hundred forty-four (144) were pursuing BS degrees in HEA, forty-six (46) in the MA program, and forty-three (43) in the MS Ed. Health Teacher program. With an overall approximately 50% graduation rate, and an increased interest in community health education and nutrition and the commencement of the MA program, those numbers are perched to increase even more.

The HEA program provides breadth, depth, and challenge in the light of current scholarship. For example, the HEA are aligned with the areas of responsibilities and competencies for Certified Health Education Specialists (CHES). CHES is the nationally recognized professional credential awarded by the National Commission for Health Education Credentialing (NCHEC). Integrating CHES preparation into the HEA program demonstrates that students graduate with the values, knowledge and skills

appropriate to the discipline. Additionally, upon satisfactory completion of the HEA undergraduate program, students are already prepared to sit for the CHES examination. This is an advantage for the HEA program. Taking and passing the CHES examination is providing professional readiness and increased employability for the Lehman student.

Upon reviewing the HEA curriculum, I observed a menu of courses in alignment with other competitive Health Education programs within the geographic area. These courses will provide the strong foundation on which the new health professionals could compete with their peers, while building a good career in the field. Furthermore, three years ago, an innovative initiative created an HEA dual-credit option for undergraduates. This option allows undergraduates to take up to 12 graduate MA credits and fulfill both undergraduate BS and graduate credits, opening a door to next level education for these students. In addition, creating the fully online MA in Health Education allows students to study asynchronously and in the comfort of their own home and on their own time. This breaks down the barrier of access to an MA program that requires the student to be at a certain place and in a certain time. Initiating the MA program also indicates the department's willingness to keep pace with developments in the field, while continuing to elevate the student body.

With over 60 adjunct professors contributing to didactic learning, students receive timely, relevant information from practitioners in the field. These professionals bring current health policy, practice, issues and decision-making concerns to the classroom in real time, years before they would appear in a textbook. Adjunct professors are also an important opening to internship, employment and the provision of research opportunities for graduates of the program. Many of the graduates return as adjuncts, completing the circle by giving back to their alma mater and advocating for the program. This is a strength of this program.

The Health Education and Promotion program at Lehman College is a commuter program. There is no residential living-and-learning opportunity. This serves the Bronx well as there is proximity to public transportation in this well-known urban county in the New York megapolis. A commuter program decreases the financial burden as students could continue to live at home as they complete their education. The HEA program is a gateway into the American Dream for immigrants and first-generation Americans who reside there. As a result, a large portion of the student body hail from another country, and speak a different mother tongue than English. Additionally, this campus was recognized as number 13 in “The Best Hispanic serving colleges in America” (Niche, 2020)

Throughout the site visit, one of the themes that was clear was inadequate fiscal support for the HEA program. It is critical that financial resources are available in order to continue to grow the programs, attract and retain great faculty, attract and retain great students, and provide a continued high quality learning experience. Located in the Bronx, the Bronx Community College provides a pipeline of students for this program. However, with lower financial resources, many people in the neighborhood are still unable to pay for college. Lehman continues to be expensive for immigrants and citizens in the community who earn at or around minimum wages. This results in fewer qualified students attending the college; thus, Lehman and the HEA program are challenged to accomplish the mission of the institution. This is an opportunity for development.

In order to sustain and improve the HEA program, provide lower cost learning experiences by helping more students to overcome the financial barriers that prevent them from getting a college education. a multi-faceted marketing program is indicated. Social media, campus recruiting, tabling at conferences and college fairs, Instagram. Television, billboards, and banners are still some of the most effective ways to stir up interest in any product. Education is no exception. Consumer spending increases on products that are branded well, and for whom the niche is clear. The HEA program should consider branding their program and permeating the market with the mission and strategies that are already in place.

The best faculty are life-long learners. They deserve to continue their quest for learning by being able to attend professional conferences, present their research at associations' annual meetings, and make their mark in the field. Scholarships should be readily available to them for continuing education, which will continue to serve the students and residents of the Bronx.

In order to "equip HEA graduates with academic and field-based training", opportunities to volunteer with health-based non-governmental organizations (NGO) as well as governmental agencies is an important part of any program. This program has an internship program. However, the effect of a stipend, and wider networks from a community-engaged faculty could improve and increase recognition in the field. It would also incentivize the program.

Some exciting changes are on the horizon for the Department of Health Sciences: the reorganization from eleven (11) to three (3) divisions would allow those in charge to place their full attention on individual programs, thus having the capacity to improve the HEA program. The moratorium on academic fees and fees for certificated and credentialed exams would really help to increase the numbers of people participating in those programs, if they have knowledge of this prospect.

Another innovation at Lehman which would affect this program, is the plan to offer instate tuition rates for all online classes, regardless of the state in which the student resides. That will help to position Lehman to continue to be an educational leader in urban campuses and improve their standing with similar competing educational institutions.

The Accelerate, Complete, and Engage (ACE) comprehensive program at Lehman College is planned to help students complete their academic journey to the bachelor's degree within two years (for transfer students) or four years (for freshmen). "ACE provides a range of financial, academic, and personal support, including intensive academic advisement and career counseling, as well as tuition, textbook, and transportation assistance." This is another way that Lehman demonstrates the institutional



commitment to members of the sending community. This initiative will also enhance the academic experience for the students allowing them to enter the workforce earlier. The HEA graduates would have an advantage in the job placement marketplace.

## **II. Undergraduate Program**

The undergraduate program in Health Education and Promotion at Lehman College is fully aligned with the college mission. The learning goals of the HEA are also aligned with the mission of the College. This BS in Health education and Promotion has two options for completion. Option 1 is the Community Health option, and it requires 48-49 credits. Option 2 is the Community Health and Nutrition option and students need 57.5 credits to be awarded the degree. Furthermore, the courses offered, from the department or core courses, to the health education courses, and the co-requisites are like the courses offered by other competing programs. The array of courses will ground the students with a wide variety of options and interest that they could practice within the field.

Conversations with current students revealed a passion for their college and professors. They believe that the high quality of the faculty is the driving force behind the success of the program. They cited quick responses to emails and phone calls help them to stay connected to the program as their questions are answered in a timely fashion. They were impressed with the adjuncts who are leaders in their field, and they referenced employment tips, jobs, and internship opportunities that were shared by the faculty in general.

Undergraduate students were happy that most, if not all courses have an online section allowing them to continue their education as they work fulltime. However, since the COVID19 pandemic, they believe that all courses should have an online component.

### **III. Graduate Program**

The MA in Health Education and Promotion requires 33 credits to complete and it is a fully online program. Admission into the program is readily available online and is attainable by many. The courses are well structured and courses are offered quite often. In addition, the dual BS/MA program allows students to matriculate into the MA program while simultaneously achieving their undergraduate degree. It becomes more financially amenable to the students.

The graduate students who participated in our discussions lauded the fully online MA program. They felt that online classes allow them to learn even more than with in-person classes as they could continue to learn and explore even more than an in-person class could contain within a prescribed time. This passion is observed with the increasing interest into the program.

Graduates of the MA in Health Education and Promotion are being prepared to take the Certified Health Education Specialist (CHES) and Master Certified Health Education Specialist (MCHES) examinations. In addition, MA graduates are prepared to provide competent, outstanding health education in any setting. They learn how to master the competencies outlined by the National Commission for Health Education Credentialing Inc. (NCHEC). Through internship and research opportunities and collaborating with practitioners in the field, MA graduates are poised to enter the workplace at a high level of competency, improving their economic mobility.

#### **C. FACULTY:**

The faculty that I interviewed are passionate about their work and helping the students. They are widely published and their scholarship and leadership in their respective fields are evident from their comprehensive curriculum vitae. There are only three full time faculty in this department. This is

inadequate for the number of students and for commitment and continuity in the program. Lehman is a mainly Hispanic serving institution, with a significant black population. On the website, the full-time faculty are not as diverse as I expected. I did not see a single black person, though upper leadership are black. There were no photographs of the adjunct faculty so I could not ascertain if there is where the black diversity lay.

There was interest among some faculty to explore more online offerings. As the COVID19 pandemic has demonstrated, preparation is essential for a smooth transition. Some faculty found online tutorials to learn to teach virtually and felt very successful at it. In some discussions other faculty felt isolated while teaching online as they were disconnected from the institution. Others felt ill-equipped to pivot from face-to-face instruction to virtual instruction.

Virtual education is a part of the landscape and all faculty should be comfortable teaching in that way. It is obvious that there were many levels of preparedness to teach online, and this affected the way the courses were taught. It is also an essential skillset to faculty going forward.

Overall, the faculty's commitment was evident in our discussion. It was also evident by the number of responsibilities that they had as they tried to meet many deliverables that would be better met by hiring more full-time faculty.

#### **D. STUDENTS**

The self-study report states, "The Health Education and Promotion (HEA) program at Lehman College aims ...to serve the Bronx and the surrounding community, as well as to offer an education that embraces the diversity of our students and encourages their personal and academic development." I saw the diversity in the students and the excitement about the opportunity to earn an education. The

self-study further continues: “Herbert H. Lehman College is the only senior college of the City University of New York (CUNY) located in the Bronx. Lehman is a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). It is CUNY’s only senior college with a Hispanic majority undergraduate student population and a significant Black student population. The College also has a high proportion of non-traditional students. Recent trend data show that four out of ten Lehman students are over the age of 25; this is significantly higher than all other CUNY senior colleges (42.6% versus 25.7%). The College is committed to serving as an engine of upward mobility by providing opportunities for applied and experiential learning and career engagement for its students. The need for applied learning is especially acute in the Hispanic community.”

The vision and mission of Lehman College is admirable. They have identified the needs of the community served, and has woven issues of social justice, and economic mobility into the fabric of their values. I only saw a small number of students in my virtual visit, so extrapolation is not possible from my sample size. However, I believe that one aspect of change that could affect students, is if the student could see themselves in the faculty that teaches them. It would be essential to diversify the full-time faculty in this program.

One of the issues discussed during my visit was how the students responded to the new normal of the COVID19 pandemic. Students were not prepared to move from in person to distant learning. Students reported not having adequate internet as well as computers outfitted with software to support their educational experience. Some students were not computer savvy to navigate the courses on the online learning system used by Lehman, and so felt left behind.

If the student body has so many identified information technology deficits, it would be prudent to address this basic preparedness need to position the students for a successful learning experience.

## **E. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS:**

The Health Education and Promotion program at the Department of Health Sciences, Lehman College, City University of New York is a commendable program. This program has the commitment of the Lehman administration to provide continuous quality improvement, as well as barrier-breaking innovations to improve the student body and afford educational opportunities to those who need it from the community. In addition, the passion observed from the faculty interviewed, conveyed the assurance that Health Education is not only a vocation, but an avocation for each of them. This translates into excitement for the program and its continued development and improvement, observed in interviews with faculty, students and alumni alike.

Comparing the HEA program with other Health Education programs within institutions of the same ilk, this one ranks among the best. Its strengths include the following: the type and quality of the programs offered, including the fully online Master's degree, as well as the BS/MA dual credit program; a committed faculty; a diverse student body and staff; geographic location in the community; proximity to Bronx Community College; professional readiness for the CHES examination; and an adjunct cadre of health professionals from public health, government, hospitals, and NGOs from the community.

Some opportunities for future development include: articulating with the two community colleges in the Bronx to help students to transition smoothly into the BS program; collaborating with local high schools to promote the programs and integrate the study of health education on a continuum from high school to college; creating an adjunct faculty group to learn from and share with each other; marrying degree completion with attainment of the CHES certification; creating a mentorship program for all junior faculty; increasing the number of full time faculty lines; online teaching development for all faculty; online learning development for all students; and expanding and integrating health informatics throughout the HEA programs.

Other opportunities that could be explored are becoming certified to offer a certificate in public health (CPH); teaching first aid and CPR as practical applications widely used in the practice of health education; students sponsoring and running at least one health fair every year. These applied and experiential opportunities are critical in areas of high poverty and low economic mobility. It provides additional skill sets to the student, giving them an edge over the competition. These ideas require long-term commitment from the leadership at Lehman College. Expansion would mean branding and marketing these programs far and wide, investing in faculty development, training all faculty to teach virtually, and placing the program in a position to be a transformational program within the college, the community, and in the lives of its students.

The time is right for such an expansion. The COVID19 pandemic has shown the importance of timely, accurate information for decision-making. There were and are myriad teaching prospects for graduates of HEA to educate and inform the general public on COVID19 particularly in the areas of low compliance with vaccinations. The students, faculty and alumni could lead the way in providing and explaining scientific information to people in a way that they would understand, and be able to make informed decisions concerning their health

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