

To: College of Arts and Sciences Curriculum Committee

From: Karen Mumford, Director
Public Health and Environmental Studies Program

Date: February 4, 2022

RE: Proposal to create the Department of Public Health and Environmental Studies

The Public Health and Environmental Studies program is requesting to change its status as an academic program to an academic department.

Rationale

Public Health and Environmental Studies (formerly the Watershed Institute for Collaborative Environmental Studies—[WICES]) has experienced significant change and growth in course offerings, majors, minors and certificates since its inception in spring 2009.

- Dr. Jim Boulter was appointed as Interim Director in spring 2011.
- WICES became the administrative home for the Environment, Society, and Culture minor and the Environmental Science minor effective fall 2012.
- The Environmental Public Health (ENPH) major was moved from the College of Nursing and Health Sciences to the College of Arts and Sciences and was placed in WICES in fall 2013.
- A new Environmental Studies (ENV) prefix was implemented in fall 2013.
- A Public Health minor (PH-m) was established in fall 2017.
- A Public Health major (PH-M) and the PH prefix were implemented in fall 2020.
- The program name changed from WICES to the Public Health and Environmental Studies (PHES) program effective fall 2021.
- A certificate in Sustainability and Climate Action will be offered beginning fall 2022.

Our unit offerings began to expand with the inclusion of the ENPH major. The new PH-M, PH-m, and Sustainability certificate programs were created by PHES faculty and are housed in PHES. In addition to expanded curricular offerings, the following specific aspects of the unit support the transition to a department:

- Size of faculty: Our staffing has increased from one half-time faculty member to 5.5 tenured or tenure track faculty, all of whom have their tenure home in PHES. We also receive the support of a part-time ADA. With the increasing demand for public health courses and the proposed establishment of an online master's degree in public health, we anticipate that our tenured and tenure track faculty will grow to 7.5.
- Enrollment in majors and minors: Enrollment continues to grow in our new Public Health major, which is in its first year, and the Public Health minor (established in AY 2017/18) as well as in the environmentally-themed minors:

PHES majors/minors 2017/18 – 2020/21 (Spring term)

	2017/18	2020/21
Environmental Public Health	43	26
Public Health Major	--	32
Public Health Minor	19	42
Environment, Society, and Culture Minor	9	33
Environmental Science Minor	12	20
Total	83	153

- Unit visibility: The Covid-19 pandemic and growing interest in climate action and sustainability initiatives has increased the program profile within our local community. We intend our service to the community will continue. We also anticipate growing interest in our public health major and minor as well as our sustainability and carbon reduction minors and certificate
- New Masters of Public Health (MPH) degree: UW-Eau Claire received a \$9.4 million workforce innovation grant from the Wisconsin Economic Development Corp to meet the workforce needs for rural health and wellbeing. One initiative of the grant is to create new degree programs in high skills areas, of which one is a Masters degree in Public Health (MPH). The creation of this program will increase faculty and program staffing. In addition, accreditation will be required for a successful MPH degree. Along with the other reasons for becoming a department, departmental status is necessary because it communicates strong institutional support for the MPH program among accreditation officials. Transitioning to the status of a department reflects the willingness of faculty and the administration to take PHES to the next level—providing strong offerings for both undergraduate and graduate students.
- Recruitment: By approving departmental status for PHES, the institution signals long-term support for our majors, minors, and certificate that will enhance the recruitment of students and faculty. Because the study of public health and environmental justice addresses issues of equity, diversity and inclusivity, a greater proportion of women and students of color should be attracted to PHES. Thus, departmental status will enhance our capacity to attract diverse students and faculty to campus.

In summary, the request to change the status of PHES from a program to department is based on:

- The growth of our curricular offerings
- Increasing number of faculty to support these offerings
- The need for improved visibility and to reflect strong institutional support
- The accreditation needs for the new MPH program
- Increasing our ability to recruit diverse faculty and students

Proposal approved by program faculty on February 2, 2022.

Requested effective date: Effective upon approval at all levels of governance; changes to appear in the 2023-2024 catalog.