

University Senate

Proposed: February 23, 2018

Adopted: Unanimously by voice vote

RESOLUTION TO ESTABLISH A PROGRAM LEADING TO A DUAL MASTER'S IN PUBLIC HEALTH AND A MASTER OF SCIENCE IN BIOETHICS (MSPH AND SPS)

WHEREAS, many issues in public health, including the social, behavioral, biological, environmental and structural determinants of health, raise bioethical issues, and

WHEREAS, public health professionals are called upon to balance individual rights with the interests of the public at large, to promote justice and address inequalities, and to design ethical research projects involving human subjects, and

WHEREAS, the focus on ethics and human rights is a major theme of the public health core curriculum, and

WHEREAS, many students have cross-registered between these two programs, demonstrating a demand for a dual degree, and

WHEREAS, graduates of the proposed program would be prepared for positions in departments of health, nonprofit organizations, governmental agencies, and university or hospital settings, and

WHEREAS, among Columbia's Ivy peers, only the University of Pennsylvania currently offers such a program, and the proposed program would be the only one of its kind among the top ten public health programs in the Northeast,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Senate approve the creation of a program leading to a dual master's in public health from the Mailman School of Public Health and a master of science in bioethics from the School of Professional Studies, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Education Committee review the program five years after its inauguration.

Proponent:
Education Committee

Purpose

The purpose of this proposed dual degree program is to provide individuals with public health training at the Mailman School of Public Health and bioethics training at the School of Professional Studies at Columbia University.

This combined interdisciplinary education in public health and bioethics will prepare dual degree students to meet the challenges they will encounter in their professional careers in healthcare, public health, government, non-profit, hospital and university settings.

The goal of this program is to create a cohort of professionals who will be able to take a leadership role in the delivery and evaluation of public health services grounded in and shaped by their strong foundational knowledge in bioethics, as well as bioethicists who have an understanding of issues that affect health at the public as well as individual levels. The proposed program is premised on several key assumptions: that public health initiatives can pose bioethical challenges; that the study of bioethics can contribute important analytic insights into resolving public health challenges; and that an understanding of the science of public health will help to inform bioethical inquiry. There are numerous synergies between these two realms of study and professional practice; there is clearly a growing need for education and training that combines the lenses of both public health and bioethics.

Many issues within the sphere of public health—including the social, behavioral, biological, environmental and structural determinants of health—raise bioethical issues. Bioethical challenges arise when we make policies to confront both communicable and non-communicable diseases, and when we make decisions about healthcare policy. How do we balance individual rights with the interests of the public at large? How do we as a society best promote the health of our citizens? How can—and should—healthcare systems and policies promote justice and address inequalities? Further, there are ethical implications that must be considered when public health scientists conduct research – or when public health authorities enact initiatives – in domestic and international settings.

The mission of the Mailman School is to educate the next generation of public health leaders. As part of this mission, the Mailman School has been committed to an interdisciplinary approach to public health and a focus on social determinants of health across the life course. The establishment of a dual degree program with the Bioethics Program that will integrate public health education with training in bioethics is an extension of the Mailman School's inter-disciplinary approach to educating the next generation of public health leaders. It also builds upon the Mailman School's strong base of research and teaching on the ethical dimensions of public health.

The mission of the School of Professional Studies (SPS) is to provide a rigorous education, informed by rapidly evolving global market needs, that supports the academic and professional aspirations of the student community. The establishment of a dual program with the Mailman School supports the SPS' and the Bioethics program's vision for interdisciplinary thought leadership, innovative pedagogy, and globally competitive academic programs.

The proposed program will not replace or duplicate any existing programs. It builds upon the unique strengths of both schools, including the Center for the History and Ethics of Public Health at the Mailman School, and it is consistent with other efforts to leverage this capacity, including the

proposal currently under review with the Jewish Theological Seminary for a dual degree program in public health and Jewish ethics.

Need

One of the major themes of the Mailman School of Public Health's core curriculum is the focus on ethics and human rights. The core curriculum also focuses on the social determinants of health across the life course and how social factors such as education, poverty, working conditions, and discrimination influence the health of individuals and their communities. To the extent that social conditions create disparities within the public's health, this can be considered an ethical issue. Public Health research and scholarship have long recognized the relationships and sometimes tensions between ethics and public health. These tensions include controversies surrounding a physician's obligation to treat, informed consent, abortion, euthanasia, end-of-life decisions, genetic engineering, responses to epidemics such as Ebola and HIV/AIDS, involuntary quarantines, concerns of privacy versus benefits of reporting, and organ transplantation.

There is much literature that addresses public health ethics; there is also much scholarship in the area of bioethics. These areas of scholarship are distinct, but find significant overlap and continue to draw insights from each other. There is increasing communication and interaction between these two schools of thought.

We have seen considerable interest among both public health and bioethics students in receiving such cross-disciplinary training in order to expand their knowledge and skills and broaden their career prospects. Many students in the MS in Bioethics program have cross-registered at the Mailman School to take public health electives, and many applicants to the MS Bioethics degree also apply to MPH programs simultaneously (some students accepted to the Bioethics program choose to pursue the MPH instead). At the Mailman School, there has long been interest in public health ethics, as indicated by the certificate in History, Ethics, and Law, one of 24 certificates that MPH students may pursue. Many of these students have expressed interest in complementing their training in public health ethics with training in bioethics. At least one of our MS Bioethics alumni has also completed a MPH.

The dual degree program will consist of two existing master's programs. The program will be five terms long, with the first year devoted to the requirements for a master's in public health, and the second year a bioethics program with a public health focus. Since there is already some crossover in the electives for the two programs, standard transfer credits will be applied.

A limited number of institutions in the metropolitan area and in the Northeast offer a dual MPH/Bioethics degree. Of programs offering dual MPH and bioethics degrees, Columbia would be the only Ivy League school, besides the University of Pennsylvania, to do so. In addition, the proposed program would be the only one with a top ten school of public health in the Northeast. Moreover, bioethics is an interdisciplinary program that relies on faculty drawn from medicine, law, and philosophy, in addition to public health. Each of these programs at Columbia is ranked in the top 10 in the nation.