

The Public Health Leadership Institute of Florida: Training Leaders and Linking Academic Public Health with the Practice Community

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Abstract

The Public Health Leadership Institute (PHLI) of Florida was founded in 1994 at the University of South Florida College of Public Health (USF COPH) and funded initially through a cooperative agreement between the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Association of Schools of Public Health. The PHLI contributes to the USF COPH's statutory mission to educate public health officials and provide leadership in developing academic programs that meet Florida's needs. The PHLI is: (1) responding to the call for public health leadership development; and (2) meeting the strong need for increased linkages between academic public health and the practice community. The PHLI admitted its first class of scholars in 1996 and in May 2005, admitted its tenth class for year-long study. Approximately 30 scholars are admitted annually through a competitive process. Among other topics, the curriculum includes personality and leadership, personal and organizational vision development, organizational communication, conflict negotiation, emotional intelligence, political effectiveness, systems thinking, team building, risk communication, media relations, crisis leadership, and project planning. Many program graduates have attained leadership positions in the Florida Department of Health and in public health associations elsewhere.

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Introduction

The Public Health Leadership Institute (PHLI) of Florida is a major initiative of the University of South Florida College of Public Health (USF COPH) for training the public health workforce and for linking the academic and public health practice communities. Faculty of the USF COPH created the PHLI in response to several needs identified for the USF COPH and other accredited schools of public health. For example, according to Florida statutes:

The Department (of Health) shall foster the recruitment, retention, and continuing education and training of health professionals and managers needed to administer the public health mission. This responsibility shall be conducted in cooperation with federal, state, and local agencies whose purpose is to prepare persons for service in public health, especially . . . the College of Public Health of the University of South Florida (29 FRS sec. 381.0301 [1]).

The Florida Legislature intends that the College of Public Health of the University of South Florida assume a leadership role within the public health system through the development of academic programs intended to meet this state's unique health care, environmental, economic, political, and social service needs. Beyond its roles as educator of public health professionals in this state and as sponsor of relevant academic research, the School of Public Health shall be consulted by the public officials of this state in

the management of public health affairs (29 FRS sec. 381.0301 [2]).

A continuing theme of national studies of public health is the need for improving leadership for public health officials. In 1988, the pivotal Institute of Medicine (IOM) study *The Future of Public Health* (IOM, 1988) reported:

Today, the need for leaders is too great to leave their emergence to chance. Yet there is little specific focus in public health education on leadership development . . . (p. 6)

In 2004, two IOM reports concluded that the need for leadership development was still pressing. *The Future of the Public's Health in the 21st Century* (IOM, 2003a) recommended:

. . . that leadership training, support, and development be a high priority for governmental public health agencies and other organizations in the public health system and for schools of public health that supply the public health infrastructure with its professionals and leaders (p. 122).

Who Will Keep the Public Healthy? (IOM, 2003b) states:

Schools of public health are in the ideal position to focus on this needed leadership development because of the range of skills and knowledge represented within the faculty, and because of

the partnerships that can be sustained with public health practice (p. 110).

Finally, a recurring finding and recommendation in studies of public health in the United States is the need for improving and expanding the generally weak relationships between academic programs in public health and the practice community, and encouraging greater collaboration (Association of Schools of Public Health, 2000; Institute of Medicine, 2003a; Institute of Medicine, 2003b; Gebbie & Hwang, 1998; Joint Council of Governmental Public Health Agencies, 1995; O'Neil, 1993).

The PHLI of Florida has contributed to the USF COPH's statutory mission through providing rich leadership development to the public health workforce. It also has been a significant means for connecting the academic and practice communities of Florida. The remainder of this article will describe the PHLI's creation, the recruitment of its first class, and its evolution over a decade

The Founding of the Public Health Leadership Institute of Florida

The response of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to *The Future of Public Health* (IOM, 1988) was an important factor leading to the creation of the PHLI. CDC provided funding for the development and implementation of a national public health leadership institute in the early 1990s and then began to fund state level leadership institutes through a cooperative agreement between CDC and the Association of Schools of Public Health (ASPH).

In 1993, Ms. Susan Webb and Dr. W. Michael Reid learned of CDC's interest in investigator initiated proposals from a presentation by a representative of the ASPH at the College. In the spring of 1994, Dr. Reid, Ms. Webb, and Dr. Phillip J. Marty submitted an investigator-initiated proposal under a cooperative agreement initiative and were provided a three-year award for a feasibility study, a planning effort, and an implementation year. The feasibility study identified great interest and need for leadership development on the part of leaders of the Florida Department of Health, including the State Health Officer, Dr. Charles S. Mahan. The planning year saw formation of an advisory committee composed of many of Florida's key public health spokespersons such as Dr. Mahan, Dr. Leslie Beitsch, Dr. Mark Maggenheim, Dr. Jean Malecki, Dr. Jane Polkowski, Dr. Gladys Branich, and Dr. Joyner Sims.

The PHLI of Florida was the fourth state level institute created (the others being in Missouri, Illinois, and Ohio). Today there are 11 state and 9

multi-state public health leadership institutes, 4 national programs, and several international programs that compose the National Public Health Leadership Development Network. Dr. Reid was the first elected President of the Network (2001-2002).

The PHLI of Florida differed from its peer institutes in several ways. First, in accordance with the founders' belief that the need for strong leadership existed throughout public health, it encouraged applications from all levels within the Florida Department of Health and other organizations. Second, a founding principle was that much of the essential learning had to occur during face-to-face meetings. Thus, the first year program became the standard for subsequent years – six face-to-face meetings along with work on the Internet or by conference calls between the meetings. This is a larger number of on-site meetings than most of the other institutes. Finally, believing that CDC would never be able to provide full support to the PHLI, the program founders required a tuition payment for the first class of scholars and subsequent classes. In addition to the tuition, the PHLI has received funding for its activities from CDC, the Health Resources and Services Administration, and the Florida Department of Health. The PHLI became part of the Florida Center for Leadership in Public Health Practice, which was designated as a Type 2 Center within the State University System in 1999 (see the Center's web site at <http://hscprime.hsc.usf.edu/PUBHEALTH/clph/index.html>).

The First Class of Public Health Leadership Institute Scholars

Given the strong encouragement from the PHLI's advisors, its founders concluded that "if we build it they will come," borrowing a line from *Field of Dreams*, a popular movie of the era. The PHLI's founders were apprehensive, however, as they publicized the first class application process in the spring of 1996. Would they come? Who would come? Would it be successful? The PHLI received 24 applications for the "First Class," as they came to be called. The applicants were already strong figures within the Florida Department of Health or in the private sector. The staff and scholars first met at a reception at Dr. Marty's home.

Everyone's apprehension was soon dispelled and the basis for strong personal relationships among scholars and PHLI staff members were established. This interaction and relationship building became the pattern for subsequent classes.

Dr. David Satcher, then Director of the Centers for Disease Control, addressed the scholars the next day and welcomed them to the program at a reception

at USF President Betty Castor's home, the Lifsey House. The reception was attended by many leaders in public health, the private health care sector, and public officials. During the evening, Sam Bell, Chair of the USF COPH's Advisory Board, and Dr. Mahan, newly appointed Dean of the USF COPH led a discussion of public health issues.

Evolution of the PHLI of Florida

In June 2005 the PHLI of Florida admitted the tenth class of scholars to its year-long program (see its web site at: <http://hsc.usf.edu/phlif/>). The curriculum has undergone changes over the first decade of the PHLI's existence. Core sections of the program have remained constant, whereas workshops on "planning for the future of public health" and "emotional intelligence" have been added, as well as the expansion of an entire session to reflect aspects of risk communication and crisis leadership. A number of assignments, activities and exercises have been implemented to complement the in-class program. The presentation approach as well as several of the presenting faculty has also been altered over the years. Program staff members have been added, including a Co-Director, Dr. Danielle Landis, a Coordinator, Kirsten Miller, and a Program Assistant, Desiree Liburd. A learner content management system has been adopted, in the form of Blackboard, to house scholar materials, calendars, faculty presentations, discussion boards and chat rooms.

Since its founding, the PHLI has sponsored participation by many nationally recognized speakers and faculty. These include: Dr. Barney Turnock of the University of Illinois at Chicago School of Public Health, a leading figure in Public Health Practice; Dr. Stephanie Bailey, Nashville, Tennessee Director of Health, a prominent spokesperson for public health; Dr. David Satcher (1994 and 2002), first as Director of the CDC and later, as academician; Dr. Jean Malecki, Director of the Palm Beach County Health Department and leader of the response to Florida's 2001 post 9/11 anthrax scare; and Dr. Earl Fox, Administrator of the Health Resources and Services Administration.

The current curriculum for the workshops includes:

July A two-day curriculum that include workshops in self-knowledge, personality, and leadership style. The incoming class of scholars is part of the audience for the graduating scholar class project presentations and graduation ceremony. This workshop is held in conjunction with the Florida Public

- Health Association (FPHA) annual meeting.
- October A one-week program that includes leadership theories, developing and sharing a vision, analyzing organizational communications and effectiveness, emotional intelligence, team building, conflict resolution skills, political effectiveness, and the importance of relationships and networking.
- January A three-day program organized around the theme of "Leadership in Times of Crisis" that includes a crisis leadership "primer," risk communication and media effectiveness skills in times of crisis, and developing and communicating key messages.
- March A three-day program in Tallahassee focused on "Political Effectiveness." The workshops are held during the legislative session and emphasize the importance of politics, advocacy, and relationship building to successful efforts in public health. Speakers who have addressed the class during each of the nine sessions include Dr. Charlton Prather, former Florida state health officer, John Phelps, Clerk of the Florida House, Lester Abberger, and Sam Bell.
- May A three-day program that provides scholars with the opportunity to reflect on the past of public health and predict the future in developing plans to address public health needs in the next 5 to10 years.
- July A day-and-a-half program that includes opportunities for reflection and feedback regarding the program and class, presentation of individual projects, a graduation speaker, and graduation ceremony. As noted earlier, this program is held in conjunction with the FPFA annual meeting.

In addition to the formal training and education curriculum, the program also includes ongoing reading and discussion, out-of-class assignments and exercises, outdoor team building activities, and structured social events to emphasize the importance of relationship building and networking. The program incorporates ample opportunities for practicing public speaking, team leadership, group facilitation, consensus building, creativity, and professional skills.

To ensure that the PHLI scholars apply their leadership skills in significant ways, they are required to identify issues of public health significance, either in their agencies or in their communities that are not being addressed. Each scholar then designs and implements a project to address that issue, submits a formal report on the project, and makes a formal presentation of the project at graduation. Projects have ranged from establishing medical and dental clinics, revising regulations, and streamlining Medicaid processes, to creating new programs, organizing community coalitions, and writing policy manuals subsequently adopted by the Florida Department of Health. A sample of projects can be found on the PHLI web site (<http://hsc.usf.edu/phlif/>).

The PHLI is meeting its primary goal: strengthening the leadership skills of its participants. Formal and informal evaluations of the program have identified high levels of satisfaction with the program. Many scholars report that the year of study has been one of the most important experiences of their lives. Scholars state that they have increased knowledge of public health and greater self confidence. They also report that they are able to apply the skills learned during the workshops directly in their work.

Another important contribution of the PHLI has been the linkage of the academic and public health practice communities across the state, especially linkage to the leadership in the Florida Department of Health. With the admission of the tenth class in 2005, nearly 300 public health workers will have participated in the PHLI. Over time, participants have come from most of Florida's 67 county health departments and many of the central office units of the Florida Department of Health in Tallahassee. Some participants also have come from the USF COPH itself, private and not-for-profit organizations, and other universities. Thus, the USF COPH, through the PHLI, has reached public health practitioners statewide in ways envisioned by the Florida Legislature and national public health studies.

Many PHLI graduates have advanced to higher positions in the Florida Department of Health, including directing county health departments, managing units within health departments, and

advancing to senior positions within the Department's central office. In addition, PHLI graduates have become leaders in Florida's public health organizations. For example, during 2004, Presidents of the Florida Public Health Association, the Florida Environmental Association, the Florida Association of County Health Officers, and the Florida Association of Public Health Nurses all were PHLI graduates. Typically, about half of the FPHA Board members are PHLI alumni. Several past presidents of the Southern Health Association also are alumni.

As an extension of the PHLI, Dr. Landis and Dr. Reid have presented elements of the PHLI curriculum to officials of ministries of health and schools of medicine from other countries. They have provided workshops at the USF COPH and overseas to officials from Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, India, Columbia, and Venezuela. The officials have found the principles in the leadership workshops to be attractive for developing their training and practice in public health in their own countries.

The Future

Given the enthusiasm of its participants and perceived value of the PHLI, a bright future seems to be ahead. The 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 scholar years were noteworthy because of the increased number of program applications. The competitive process also led to two of the largest classes in the history of the PHLI.

The PHLI is an active member of the National Public Health Leadership Development Network (NPHLDN). The NPHLDN provides opportunities to network with other leadership institutes, to share and gain knowledge about innovative programs responsive to public health issues, and to examine public health leadership needs. PHLI scholars have won several awards for their projects in competition with graduates of other institutes and have presented their projects at annual meetings of the American Public Health Association. PHLI staff members will continue to use this and other opportunities to improve and further develop the program and to share its best practices nationally.

The PHLI's strong alumni network, responsive program, excellent national reputation, and dedicated staff members provide the foundation for the PHLI to continue its roles as a significant force in public health leadership development in Florida and in strengthening the linkages between the academic and public health practice communities. PHLI staff members will ensure that its programs continue to be responsive. These initiatives, in turn, should

contribute to the ultimate goal of better health outcomes for Floridians.

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