

CAMPUS LIFE

Wesleyan To Offer Master's Program in Public Health

NC Wesleyan intends to introduce its third graduate program next fall—a master's degree in public health.

To be offered in online format, the program must first be approved by the university's accrediting agency, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). A decision is anticipated in late spring. If approved, the program will begin in fall 2023, with a cohort of 10 students, according to Dr. Shannon Crowley, Associate Professor of Exercise Science.

It's expected that the 42-credit degree program will take 15 months to complete, Dr. Crowley said. In line with her department's specialty area, the master's will provide a concentration in Physical Activity and Health and will require a capstone class as well as a one-semester practicum for students to gain field experience.

The Decree interviewed Dr. Crowley in late November and early December.

Q: What was the impetus of the new

master's program in public health?

SC: This is an idea that my colleagues and I, and the administration, had been considering for several years. We realized that there was an unmet need for a public health-related graduate program, both in terms of student needs, and the impact such a program could have on the surrounding community. After speaking with students, administration, colleagues, and community members, and considering current faculty expertise, we determined that an MPH with an emphasis in physical activity and health would be an innovative, impactful, and successful program at NCWU.

Q: Provide a profile of the typical student who would be interested in this program.

SC: I believe that a large percentage of our MPH cohort will be com-



Dr. Shannon Crowley
Photo courtesy S. Crowley

prised of NCWU undergraduate students, likely in the fields of Exercise Science, Health Promotion, Biomedical Sciences, Healthcare Administration, Nursing, and potentially others such as Psychology or Business Administration. Because we are also offering a Certificate of Graduate Study in Public Health, I imagine that we will also have a percentage of adult students who are looking to augment their current career skills with the certificate program.

Q: Have you projected what percentage of MPH students will be Wesleyan alums?

SC: I would imagine that at least 50 percent would be.

Q: How many students would you expect to see in the first cohort and then after a few years of operation?

SC: We're planning to limit the MPH cohort to 10 students, at first, and then re-evaluate after the program starts. We may accept up to 15 additional students in the certificate program, even initially. Once the program is well established, we would likely increase the number of students in each MPH cohort. We decided on a conservative initial number of students for several reasons, including making sure we have an adequate number of professional practicum sites for MPH students to complete their applied practice experiences, at the end of their program.

Q: What markets will you be covering? And what existing graduate programs figure to be Wesleyan's

main competitors in this area?

SC: Because this is an online program, it could be marketed anywhere, though I think that the bulk of our student interest will be from North Carolina and surrounding areas. There are five accredited MPH programs in the state, and only one other accredited online MPH program at a private university (Lenoir-Rhyne's MPH with a concentration in Community Health Assessment). NCWU would be the only MPH program in the state to have an MPH with a specialization in Physical Activity and Health. Considering that the Health Department has identified "exercise, nutrition, and weight" as the top health priority for Nash County, our program fills an important gap in current MPH program offerings in the state.

Q: We understand the program is 100 percent online. Why did Wesleyan decide to select that format?

SC: Online MPH programs have gained in popularity in recent years, and several accredited MPH programs in North Carolina are offered online. So our decision was based in part on making sure the program could be viable and competitive in this market. Another factor was that online programs help to increase access to educational opportunities for students who might otherwise have transportation and other barriers. As the program grows, we might also consider offering a seated graduate program in Public Health.

Q: How do you reconcile the online format with the need for degree candidates who will interact

face-to-face with clients. Wouldn't it be helpful to offer more "hands-on," in-person training?

SC: To clarify, this is not a healthcare or medical degree. Public health has more of a focus on population health, especially in the context of prevention of disease. Rather than direct patient care, a public-health professional's responsibilities would more likely involve planning, implementing and evaluating health promotion programs; writing grants; conducting research; conducting public health surveillance to identify and intervene on health-damaging behaviors in populations; and recommending policies. It's important to note that the program includes a one-semester practicum, where students work at a public health-related site and gain hands-on experience in the field.

Q: Who will teach the classes? Let's go ahead and name them, and their area of expertise—at least the lead instructors. And will any new hires be made?

SC: Most courses will be taught by me (Health Aspects of Physical Activity) and a new tenure-track hire (required to have a doctorate in Public Health or related field). Dr. Meir Magal (Exercise Physiology) will teach two exercise-science based courses in the program, and Dr. Danielle Braxton (Public Health Nutrition) will teach two courses in the program as well.

Q: Will the college require new facilities or equipment to administer this program?

SC: No.

University Student Body Hit Hard by Fall Illnesses

While Covid cases have tapered off, many students still experienced a high rate of common respiratory infections after fall break.

The Decree interviewed Health Center Director Jessica Brys-Wilson in late November about the surge of illness that resulted in many students missing a substantial amount of class time.

Q: First, can you give the illness a name?

A: We had several illnesses circulating this semester. We had an upper respiratory infection (URI), like a common cold, that was pretty miserable for most people. We also had a brief gastroenteritis (stomach virus) and then influenza.

Q: What were the most common symptoms and what was the treatment?

A: With the URI, most students had sore throat, nasal congestion and fatigue. This one was particularly bad for five to six days and then seemed to be mild for another five days or so. The stomach virus caused nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. It lasted 24-48 hours in most people. Influenza patients most frequently presented with a sudden

onset of fever, chills, headache, sore throat, and cough. Most students, untreated, recovered within a week. All three illnesses are viral and improve on their own. There was a secondary bacterial infection in about 10 percent of students who contracted URI; that required antibiotics. If diagnosed with 48 hours, severe influenza can be treated with Tamiflu.

Q: Is it over now or are you still seeing students become ill?

A: I'm still seeing students getting sick, but our numbers are much lower now. Fortunately, influenza has tapered off quickly. This year's flu vaccine has been effective and helped keep the numbers lower.

Q: At its peak, how many students were out of class with illness?

A: It's hard to answer this question. The URI went on for more than a month with pretty steady numbers during that time. I would estimate that about 10 percent of our student body had one of the illnesses I mentioned within the last two months.

Q: Can you make a connection between the illnesses on campus and the steps we took to prevent Covid during the past two years?

A: Since we were mostly masked over the last two years, we have had limited exposure to the recently circulating strains of colds and flu. So when we exposed without masks this year, we're all more likely to get sick.

Classes To Start a Week Earlier in Fall 2023

By L. Kasem, J. Matlock & R. Wilder
Decree Staff Writers

Beginning in 2023, NC Wesleyan will move up the start of fall semester so that students can wrap up all classes and final exams before Thanksgiving.

This past fall, classes ended prior to the holiday break, but students returned to campus for final exams. First-year Provost Joseph Lane cited many reasons for the scheduling change.

"The single largest factor was the awkward placement of the Thanksgiving holiday in our recent academic years," he explained, noting that "the holiday is not productive study time."

He said the new schedule should cut down on missed exams while it decreases pressure on faculty to put exams on-line or make them optional.

Among other reasons for the change, the provost said the most recent academic schedule led to "complicated travel arrangements" for students who live far from campus. That includes internationals, more than 15 percent of traditional

day undergraduates, he said. "The move will allow students to head home (even when home is out of the country) without worrying about return arrangements during one of the busiest travel weeks."

In an informal survey, students reacted positively to the new start date, which will be August 16 next year.

Students Lexie Collins and Elizabeth Lopez favor the move, believing the revamped schedule will lead to more enjoyable, stress-free holiday breaks. "I was hoping we would be able to be out from Thanksgiving forward, so this is really exciting!" Collins said. "It'll be an easier transition from time in the classroom to our holiday break, and make it more stress-free."

Added Lopez: "It's better that way since we don't have to worry during Thanksgiving about studying for tests. We can enjoy the time with our families and friends."

Layali Kasem, a Rocky Mount resident and a member of the honors program, acknowledged that she was initially opposed to an

earlier start. Then she experienced her first final exams week as a college student. She said the holiday break took her mind off her exams and she ended up completing other assignments at the last minute.

"I'm looking forward to next year when I can finish exams and then be on break," she said, "rather than having a break between my review for exams and the exams themselves."

Kasem also said that the new schedule will make holiday travel less complicated for internationals as well as domestic students who live far from Rocky Mount.

After careful consideration, senior Jordyn Matlock voted yes as well. She acknowledged that the change would shorten the duration of a student's summer job, but she pointed out that they will get expanded opportunities to work during the Christmas break. Besides giving students more time with family at Thanksgiving, Matlock said the new schedule will lessen stress during final exams.

See Classes pg 3

THE DECREE

since 1960

"of, by, and for the Wesleyan community."

STAFF

Staff Writers

Mary Alice Butler
Layali Kasem
Jean LaGreca
Jordyn Matlock
Rhea Wilder

Special Contributors

Carl Lewis
Andrew Stern
Grace Wallace

Faculty Advisor

Dr. William Grattan

179 Braswell • Phone: 985-5336
Email: WJGrattan@ncwc.edu



Fall sunset on Wesleyan's campus.

Photo courtesy Wesleyan PR