Identifying Gaps in Competencies Between Graduates and Entry-Level Positions & Improvement Recommendations

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### Background
**Changing Industry**
With the ever changing landscape of the Healthcare Industry constantly requiring new and different functions of its employees, ensuring that recent graduate competencies meet those changing needs is of top priority to Colleges of Public Health nationwide. Preparing students for success in a dynamic work environment requires adaptability, feedback channels, and most importantly knowledge of where to improve their coursework and of what employers are currently seeking.

**Vision 2025 Commitment**
With Oregon State just recently earning its accreditation as a College of Public Health, there is room for growth in many areas, something made clear in the Vision 2025 Plan Published by the leadership of the College. This plan outlines experiential and collaborative learning initiatives that enrich the students academic experience and better prepares them for the professional environment. Designing innovative and applicable programming that offers this type of educational experience requires constant quality improvement measures so that the experiences stay relevant, and truly prepare them for issues faced by the actual workforce.

**Alumni Relations**
There have been many attempts to leverage the Alumni Community in order to connect students to the industry, however this effort has been unsuccessful on many fronts. Many have worked to establish a database of alumni, hold networking events and generally engage those who are now in the healthcare industry with limited success. The prospect of opening a connection that better engages Alumni, and offers them benefit in the form of better prepared students entering the workforce opens opportunities for both students and employers.

### Objective
Our aim is to collect both qualitative and quantitative data connecting the aspirations, interests and available resources of students to the requirements of the actual opportunities they are seeking. We plan to analyze this connection in order to identify any gaps in the competencies between the individual and their corresponding entry level position. With these gaps in mind we then aim to identify recommendations for programs, extra curricular activities the college can utilize for other engagement that will properly supplement student learning and provide the opportunity.

### Method
The general method we took included surveying students and compiling data leaders in the industry, analyzed the differences between the two, and make recommendations aimed at closing these gaps. In order to best apply these findings to the specific needs of our College, we began by first surveying students then formulated our direction for the professional data based on these findings.

### Professional Data Sources

#### Sources
In collecting data from professionals, we embarked on the daunting task of establishing a list of OSU Alumni with relevant professions. We successfully completed the list, but needed more concrete and detailed data than time allotted, so we referred to a 2017 study by the Public Health Foundation. We then used the resources of this study to collect relevant competencies for each of the industry segments the students hoped to fill. There was plenty of information for the many specific segments, and these were consolidated into relevant data for our project.

### References

### Conclusion
From this Data we concluded that there are many fronts that the college was aiding students in preparing students, however we did find a few key gaps. The graph above shows 4 interesting comparisons between student competencies and those expected of professionals. To begin with, the 30% population of students who hope to serve in policy seem to be getting adequate policy skills, and it seems like those looking to go into healthcare sciences have good literacy in their field as well. What’s interesting is where these competencies seemed to be matched, more administrative and management competencies seem to be lacking. With the population sample being Health Management and Policy Students, these data points jump out as immediate ones to address.

### Interpretation
From the conclusions we drew from the two data sets there were many points we wanted to look into in terms of analysis and making meaning. Since it is one of the more prevalent and readily addressable issue, we decided to focus on the gaps in management and analysis training. We also focused on the noticeable amount of undecided students. For management, many of the class listings include management topics but are often focused on more specific portions of public health, such as broad knowledge in Economics, Finance, and Marketing and how they affect the healthcare landscape. Even with these classes I think we see this gap because of lack of application to industry environments. On the analysis side there are easier factors to point to such as only 2 health analysis classes and the lack of software

### Cross-Referencing
To compare our data, we collected the relevant information from the corresponding employment segments and compiled them into a single data set. We then looked at this data against the data we collected from the students. In order to get meaningful statistics we had to weight the professional data to match scales with ours.

### Key Statistics from the Cross-referenced competencies graph
- **Policy literacy**
- **Management**
- **Students**
- **Professionals**

### Expanded Resources
One issue in connecting students to industry before they are there is getting them a head start on the certifications and trainings they will need to be competitive for certain positions. Making resources such as professional memberships, basic certifications and software trainings would be excellent opportunities for students. Many leading Schools of Public Health to expose their students to industry standards and jumpstart their transition from the classroom into the office. In addition to helping students with current and future jobs, these resources would help to close a gap in analysis competencies that are a result of lack of industry used software and practices.

### Involve Clubs and Extracurriculars
It was very clear that students were not getting the exposure to professionals as best as they could be. To combat this, relevant clubs can leverage their contacts to hold informational meetings and other events to better engage students with professionals. Clubs should unify in mission to prepare students for success no matter what they want to do with their degree. An Advisory Board or Summit would be an excellent way to align purposes.

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