

***National Implementation Task Force for Accreditation in Health Education***  
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## **UPDATE ON SABPAC AND ACCREDITATION PROGRESS IN HEALTH EDUCATION**

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Efforts to further strengthen professional preparation in health education are moving ahead. After three years of study and input from the profession, the SOPHE and AAHE Boards in 2004 endorsed the recommendations of the National Task Force on Accreditation in Health Education, including that:

- 1) Accreditation be the quality assurance mechanism for health education professional preparation institutions, and should replace existing approval processes (i.e. SABPAC) in an orderly transition;
- 2) The Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH) is the preferred accrediting entity to provide a single coordinated accreditation mechanism for community/public health education programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels; and
- 3) The National Commission for Accreditation in Teacher Education (NCATE) is the preferred accrediting entity for school health education programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

These recommendations were published in the December 2004 and January 2005 issues of the Health Education and Behavior and American Journal of Health Education (respectively) are available at: [www.healthedaccred.org](http://www.healthedaccred.org).

SABPAC remains a critical element in the transition to accreditation. Eventually, the SABPAC approval process for undergraduate community health education programs will be phased out by its parent association boards (SOPHE and AAHE). However, given the complexity of negotiating agreements with accrediting agencies and the National Commission for Health Education Credentialing, as well as the need to prepare programs for accreditation, this transition period may extend to 2010 or beyond.

The original Task Force recommendations specify that, once the new system is in place, health education accreditation would occur through the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH) for both undergraduate and graduate community health education programs, and there would be no new SABPAC program approval. It is envisioned that when the system is ready for implementation, all programs holding SABPAC approval at that time would retain their approval status until the end of their designated term. At that point, or at any point once the new system begins, programs holding SABPAC approval could apply for accreditation.

SABPAC-approved programs can anticipate the following benefits during the accreditation phase-in period:

- 1) Familiarity with the processes of self-study and site visits, which will be beneficial when applying for accreditation;
- 2) Priority for scheduling accreditation reviews over requests from non-approved programs; and
- 3) Continued SABPAC approval for the duration of the designated term, thus delaying the first accreditation review until their SABPAC approval expires.

In addition, graduates of SABPAC-approved programs usually readily qualify for the CHES exam, (i.e. have the minimum of 25 credit hours in the health education areas of responsibility and competencies). Their individual eligibility will not be jeopardized once the accreditation system is in place.

Programs currently in the process of applying for SABPAC approval are highly encouraged to continue with their self-study and on-site review. SABPAC approval holds many benefits for community health education programs, including the opportunity to align resources and activities with professional standards, enhanced credibility within the university, outside leverage for resource allocation, and greater visibility for the program and the profession. Once the accreditation system is in place, the commitments a program has made during their SABPAC years may help them earn a longer term when they transition from approval to accreditation. Although there is an investment of time and resources to conduct a self-study and host an on-site SABPAC visit, applicant institutions are strongly encouraged to move ahead with the approval process to enjoy the benefits available now and to ease the transition to accreditation in the future.

**Programs that have not yet sought approval are strongly encouraged to do so.** The SABPAC committee and the National Implementation Task Force for Accreditation in Health Education will keep the profession informed of the progress towards establishing the accreditation system. There may come a time when it is more advantageous for a program to wait until the new system begins; however, at this point, programs in institutions that do not have an MPH in community health education will not be directly affected by the proposed system for several years. Until then, SABPAC remains the preferred mechanism for external professional approval of community health education programs.

In June 2005, CEPH adopted significantly revised criteria for accreditation specifying that undergraduate public health degrees may be included in the unit of accreditation for public health programs outside schools of public health, as long as they are co-located with a master's program in public health. The CEPH criteria are not limited to community health or health education undergraduate degrees. In spring 2007, the first masters-level community health education program took advantage of this option and included its undergraduate community health education degree in its unit of accreditation. Since that time one other CEPH-accredited program has added its undergraduate program to its accredited unit via a substantive change process. More are expected in the future. To support the transition to undergraduate accreditation, CEPH developed and released a technical assistance paper to assist undergraduate public health programs in interpreting and responding to the CEPH criteria ([www.ceph.org](http://www.ceph.org)) and to assist CEPH's site visitors and Council members in evaluating these programs.

To keep updated on the continued progress and developments related to implementing the new system for health education accreditation, see [www.healthedaccred.org](http://www.healthedaccred.org). The site provides news, background documents, and announcements of upcoming meetings and other presentations where you can learn more. It also provides a mechanism to ask questions, make comments, and see what others are saying about this historic and important step in the profession of health education.

If you have additional questions or comments, you may also contact the current Accreditation Task Force co-chairs directly at any time: Dr. Randy Cottrell ([randall.cottrell@uc.edu](mailto:randall.cottrell@uc.edu)) and David A. Birch ([dabirch@siu.edu](mailto:dabirch@siu.edu))

