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The idea of offering a public health program bubbled along for many years, kept alive by Dean Gutekunst and other faculty members who recognized the complementary value of a population perspective, the importance of collaboration in addressing complex health problems, and the value of the research skills upon which public health is built.

In 1998 – 20 years ago – a design team came together to create the first MPH program at the University of Florida. As you might imagine, there were many iterations at all levels to make this program a reality. It was launched in 2000 with 35 students enrolled across three concentrations. And although administering the MPH started out as a complex tri-college model involving HHP and Medicine, by 2003, the MPH moved under our college, and the name of our college was changed to Public Health and Health Professions to reflect this transformational step. Our goal even then was accreditation as a school of public health.



Of course, there were challenges:

- As we delved deeply into accreditation criteria, it became clear that our existing health professions programs would have to integrate some public health content. These unanticipated modifications were not received with great enthusiasm.
- Hiring our first faculty members was also a challenge. It takes special people to join a new enterprise on the ground floor, but we were fortunate to find some hardy, competent souls to build the program.
- And there was always the issue of funding. We were trying to grow while the Great Recession was in full force.

But other things fell nicely into place:

- We had the luxury of building our programs to fit accreditation criteria, rather than trying to retrofit them.
- We had leaders who worked tirelessly to overcome any challenges faced along the way, many of whom are in this room.
- Faculty in health professions and public health began to come together to build collaborations.
- And we recruited strong students, many of whom are now making significant contributions to UF, our local community, the state, and at the national level.

PHHP was accredited as a school of public health in 2009. It was clear to all concerned that we were just beginning, but the foundation was in place and we were on our way. And, of course, PHHP is part of the great University of Florida, where accreditation is not an option, it's a given. By 2014, when we were reaccredited, we met fully all the criteria, a relatively rare event even among our oldest and most venerable peers. I suspect that everyone in this room contributed to the accreditation of PHHP. Thank you so much!