

Integrated Health Sciences (IHS) Program Development at Iowa State University

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Project Overview

I have led the development of the Integrated Health Sciences (IHS) program at Iowa State University, an interdisciplinary undergraduate degree successfully launched in Fall 2025. The program was created to address increasing student interest in health-related careers and the growing national demand for a skilled and adaptable healthcare workforce. The IHS program integrates expertise from >10 departments across three colleges, reflecting Iowa State's strengths in life sciences, social sciences, data science, and humanities. IHS offers five specialized focus areas:

- Science of Health and Disease
- Human Health and Nutrition
- Data Science and Human Studies
- Public Policy, Ethics, and Communication in Health
- Behavioral and Mental Health Studies

The program is designed to provide students with a holistic understanding of health while maintaining flexibility to pursue diverse career pathways, including professional schools, graduate education, and workforce entry.

Initial enrollment was 12 students in Fall 2025, with rapid growth to projected 70 students by Fall 2026, demonstrating strong demand and institutional momentum.

How the Project Was Identified

The IHS program emerged from a combination of student demand, workforce needs, and institutional opportunity.

First, there has been a significant increase in student interest in health-related careers after the pandemic, including medicine, public health, and health policy. However, many students seek alternatives to traditional, rigid pre-professional pathways and desire more flexible and interdisciplinary options.

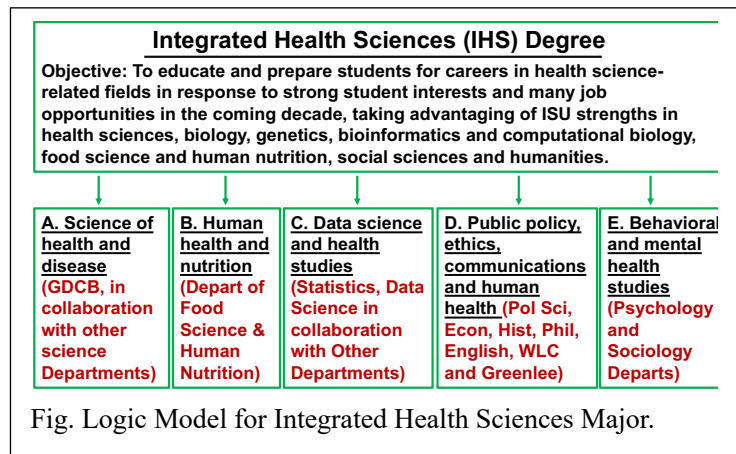
Second, workforce data indicates substantial growth in healthcare occupations, with millions of new jobs projected nationally. These roles increasingly require interdisciplinary knowledge spanning science, data, behavior, and policy.

Finally, Iowa State University recognized that existing health-related offerings were distributed across multiple departments without a unified structure (ISU does not have a Medical School). This fragmentation created both a challenge and an opportunity: by integrating these strengths into a single program, the university could better serve students while addressing workforce needs.

Obstacles That Affected the Project

The development and implementation of the IHS program involved several significant challenges.

Cross-College Coordination: The program required collaboration across three colleges and 10 departments. Aligning priorities, governance structures, and decision-making processes required sustained communication and negotiation.



Curriculum Development: Designing a cohesive curriculum across five tracks while maintaining academic rigor and flexibility was complex and challenging. Ensuring consistency in student learning outcomes across diverse disciplines required careful planning. Experts from key departments worked together to develop a cohesive curriculum.

Faculty Engagement and Resource Allocation: Securing faculty participation and balancing teaching responsibilities posed logistical challenges. Departments needed assurance that their contributions were recognized and sustainable. We identified ~40 faculty members for the program.

Program Identity and Communication: As a new interdisciplinary degree, IHS required clear messaging to distinguish it from existing majors (e.g. Biology, Genetics, Kinesiology, Psychology, etc.). Communicating its value to prospective students, advisors, and stakeholders was essential for successful recruitment.

Outcomes and Future Plans

Key Outcomes:

- Successful approval (May 2025) and launch of the IHS program in the fall 2025
- Development of five interdisciplinary academic tracks and corresponding curriculum
- Establishment of leadership and governance structures by working with 3 college leaders
- Creation of website, recruitment and advising materials by working with different groups
- Strong early enrollment trajectory (from 12 to projected 70 students within one year)
- Increased visibility through university communications and outreach

Future Plans:

- Expand recruitment efforts to sustain enrollment growth: including digital campaigns, students/family daily visits, Experiencing Iowa State (EIS), Admitted Student Days (ASD), etc.
- Develop internships and experiential learning opportunities
- Strengthen partnerships with healthcare organizations and community stakeholders
- Implement assessment strategies to evaluate student outcomes
- Scale advising and program infrastructure to support growth

What I Gained from the FSLI Program

Participation in the FSLI program was instrumental in advancing this initiative.

Leadership Development: I strengthened my ability to lead complex, interdisciplinary efforts and manage diverse stakeholder groups.

Strategic Thinking: FSLI enhanced my ability to align program development with student interests, institutional priorities and societal needs.

Change Management: The program provided tools to navigate resistance, build consensus, and sustain progress in a multi-unit environment.

Professional Network: Engagement with peers offered valuable perspectives, feedback, and support throughout the project.

Conclusion

The Integrated Health Sciences program represents a bold and forward-looking approach to undergraduate education, preparing students to address complex health challenges through interdisciplinary training. Its rapid projected growth underscores both student demand and institutional relevance. The FSLI program played a critical role in equipping me with the leadership, strategic, and collaborative skills necessary to successfully develop and implement this initiative, positioning it for long-term success.