

Delta Omega 2008 Innovative Curriculum Award Winner

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Course Title: Critical Thinking and Program Evaluation. School of Public Health and Information Sciences, School of Public Health, University of Louisville, KY 40292

Background: First year Masters of Public Health students enrolled in the Critical Thinking and Program Evaluation Course gain knowledge and skills that equip them to analyze and consider solutions to public health problems at the community and institutional levels as they evaluate programs. This course aims to give them the basic knowledge and skills for developing and evaluation plan and conducting a straightforward evaluation project.

Course Delivery: This 3 credit-hour blackboard enhanced course is taught during a regular semester using multiple formats and is designed to enable the student to discuss readings and apply concepts during small group in-class and out-of-class activities.

The Community Engagement project: Before the start of the semester public health agencies and not-for-profit agencies offering public health services are contacted and asked to provide a project that students can evaluate. Faculty work with the agency to develop a short description of their project and a specific question they would like answered. During the semester agency representatives serve as “community coaches.”

Students choose their projects and sign up for the one that most closely matches their interests. Students are in groups of 3-4 and they complete the evaluation project in consultation with their community coach. Faculty provides supervision and guidance. Students have 1 1/2 hour lectures once a week and another 1 1/2 hours for project teams to complete the Community Engagement Project related activities including completing items specified in the workbook. Faculty is available for consultation during each session and once a month students are required to meet with the community coach in class. Additional meetings are held at the community site.

At the end of the semester community coaches and their staff are invited to a PowerPoint presentation. Coaches receive a copy of the final report, the PowerPoint presentation, a letter and a gift card for a local bookstore as a sign of appreciation.

Course Evaluation: Students complete quizzes, examinations, two reflective writings and the final team project report and presentation. In addition a *student project evaluation form* and a *coach's project evaluation form* are used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data.

Lessons Learned

- Coaches would benefit from an Evaluation 101 seminar and a manual that describes the course expectations, time lines and their roles and responsibilities.
- Students need orientation at the beginning of the semester on collaboration, interpersonal communication, conflict resolution, team dynamics and process.
- Faculty needs to be copied on e-mails or otherwise be aware of all communication between students and coaches and student team members need to copy each other on work products.