

Applied Aspects of Program Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation

Health Promotion Sciences Division, Health Behavior Health Promotion Concentration

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Background: In 2004, this 4-credit, required course was dramatically changed from a theory-based course of in-class-only activities to a community-based, service-learning framework. The goal of the course is to facilitate the work of student teams (4-6) with a community agency to develop a program plan for the agency that includes: 1) an assessment of needs and assets, 2) a theory-based program to meet the needs and capitalize on the assets including the collaboration of other key community partners, 3) an implementation plan with budget outline, and 4) a process and outcome evaluation plan.

Community-Based Service Learning: In the semester preceding the course, I contact agencies that may have a need for this effort, making sure they understand that service-learning involves a reciprocal relationship of both service and learning between the students and the agency. The agency and the students learn from each other and the agency offers a service to the students as it provides them the opportunity for real world program planning, while the students provide a service to the agency in the form of new eyes seeing the issues and solutions and the final document they produce. Written in the format of a grant proposal, it can be used by the agency to dedicate or solicit funding for the program. A “Process and Timeline for the Planning Project” is developed each year to guide the students’ and the community agencies’ progress throughout the semester.

Course Evaluation: Students are graded on attendance, preparation, and participation in both in-class and out-of-class team activities, according to a rubric outlined in the Course Syllabus and based on instructor and peer evaluation through the use of a Confidential Team Member Feedback Form. They also complete a “Use of Theory to Develop Programs” critical analysis assignment as well as a series of reports on their needs assessment, program and implementation plan, and program evaluation, culminating in final class presentations and reports.

Course Impact on Students: Integrated throughout the course, student reflections indicate that their work with community agencies brings to life the readings for the course, that service learning will help them better remember many of the lessons learned during the course, and that they feel rewarded because they have provided the community agencies with a service that can actually result in improving the health of community residents. “I found myself intensely energized by the service my team was able to provide to the community.” On a 5-point scale, average student ratings regarding the value of out-of-class-activities are consistently 4.2 or above.

Course Impact on Communities: Nine different agencies have been served by this project to date, including three Community and Migrant Health Centers, a hospital diabetes outreach program, the University of Arizona College of Medicine Commitment to Underserved People Program, two neighborhood associations, a Cervical Cancer Prevention Among Latinas Project and the Tucson Indian Center Wellness Program. Many of the programs planned for these agencies have been funded and implemented, all or in part.

Lessons Learned: While service-learning courses require exceptional time and energy from faculty, community partners, and students, the exceptional learning by all is more than worth the effort.

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