Community-University Collaborations to Strengthen Public Health Skills for Native Communities

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Experience: Public Health Practitioners

- **Experience with direct service**
- **Familiarity**: community strengths, challenges, expectations and communication networks
- In rural areas, may lack access to
  - technology and/or software
  - training, requires
    - considerable travel time
    - time away from the community
Experience: Public Health Students

Familiarity:
- technology and software
- services and programs reported in the literature

Limited experience with direct service and resource and communication channels

Limited familiarity with community strengths, challenges, and expectations
Service Learning

Structured educational experience that combines community service with explicit learning objectives and reflection

Effective course development requires community and university leadership to design meaningful activities

– valuable to the community and practitioners
– applicable to student training
Skills Exchange

Students
- Learn context and practice-based skills that contribute to program implementation
- Offer training to practitioners or specialized health education to clients or communities

Community practitioners
- Gain training in technology or software that can contribute to program activities
- Model and share practice-based knowledge of community education, local resources, culture and communication
Community-University Collaboration

- Tribal communities had hosted graduate students on internship projects
- University had provided technical assistance or evaluation services to tribal communities

Partnership grew to develop an annual service learning course with 12-15 students working with community health educators
Partners

- University of Arizona, Tucson AZ
- Navajo Nation
- Hopi Tribe
Navajo Nation

More than 27,000 square miles

Population
173,667 (US Census, 2010)

110 chapters
Navajo - contemporary and traditional communities, importance of sheep
Hopi Tribe

- 2,438 square miles
- Population 7,185 (US Census, 2010)
- 12 villages
Hopi – traditional communities, limited access to utilities and continued importance of farming.
Service Learning Activities with Navajo

Students

- Built raise planting boxes for school project
- Learned domestic tasks, e.g., livestock and food preparation, water hauling

Navajo Community Health Representatives (CHR) took students on home visits; students

  - Observed CHR - client interaction
  - Taught home safety

Students and CHR work on technology:

- Locating credible online health information
- Power point presentations for community education
Service Learning Activities with Navajo
Service Learning with Hopi

- Students assisted with Fun Run
- Students and educators made health education power point presentation
Guided Reflection

- Students worked in groups to address health impact of determinants of health
- Developed final presentations – each group undertaking a theme
Challenges for the Partners

Community

- Identifying valuable short-term activities
- Gaining staff “buy-in”
- Supervisors valuing service learning and approving staffs’ engagement
- Fitting into the university course timing
- Working with significant number of students
- Limited technological skills or internet access
Challenges for the Partners

- University
  - Resources to transport and accommodate students in communities
  - Time investment > recognition and reward within the university system
  - Adaptation to limited tribal infrastructure and resources

- Long travel distances

- Road conditions

- Inclement weather
Muddy Roads
Real Experiences for Students
Benefits for the Partners

**Community**
- Opportunity to learn new skills on site
- Opportunity to showcase local health educators' skills to enthusiastic students
- Remind community practitioners of their immense experience and value

**University**
- Opportunity for students to gain real-world experience to understand the influence of culture, environment and health systems on health behaviors and outcomes
- Faculty gain insight to enrich classroom instruction
Thank you
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