

Engaging Students: The Community as Classroom

Abstract:

The purpose of this project is to explore the role of the “community as classroom” as a curricular process in the Department of Occupational Therapy. The research team proposes to explore and define a model for faculty in occupational therapy, and intended for replication by faculty across the health sciences, to engage in community-based learning with health professions students. The proposed model will explore how to develop partnerships, explore the role of students in meeting community needs, and provide tips and techniques for bridging community service to scholarship. This model is needed to support faculty desiring to employ the Scholarship of Engagement as an approach to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. This initiative also supports faculty members strongly involved with the Office of Interprofessional Scholarship, Service and Education (OISSE). Outcomes of the project will include the development of sustainable community partners that support community needs and the occupational therapy curriculum, and an assessment plan for assessing the impact of community-based learning for students, community members, and faculty.

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Project Background: According to Dr. Risa Lavizzo-Mourey, President and CEO of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, “good health comes from healthy lifestyles, good choices and a supporting environment in which to make those good decisions” (personal communication, 2008). Through partnership with local community agencies and groups, occupational therapy students and faculty act as that supporting environment for people in our community to make good health decisions.

The purpose of this project is to explore the “community as classroom” as a curricular process in the Department of Occupational Therapy (OT). The mission of Creighton's Department of OT is “to educate ethical practitioners, engage in scholarship dedicated to the pursuit of truth, serve the profession, and offer occupational therapy expertise to local and global communities” (SPAHP, online, 2008). Goodrow, et.al. identified that “curriculum development is a process and rests in part on the status of the community-campus partnerships. As the needs of the community become more clear, and the experience of the faculty and students evolves, the curriculum will be greatly enhanced” (2001). The researchers of this project believe that the involvement of community partners enhances outcomes of the OT program by facilitating authentic learning environments for students and meeting real community needs. However, the demands of building community partners requires extensive faculty commitment leaving little time for exploration of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, specifically the Scholarship of Engagement (Boyer, 1996). Furthermore, models have been developed in the service learning field but application of these concepts has not been applied and explored thoroughly in the health sciences at Creighton University, particularly in the Department of OT.

Project Purpose: We propose to explore and define a model for faculty in occupational therapy, with intended replication across the health sciences, to engage in community-based learning with their students. This model will explore how to develop community partnerships, explore the role of students in meeting community needs, and provides tips and techniques for bridging this community service to scholarship.

Project Design: Project activities will include the development and sustainability of community partners; education and development of both students and faculty in community activities and learning; exploration of assessment tools; development of an assessment plan for multiple levels (i.e. community participants, community partner, students, faculty); and development of a comprehensive model that will drive the OT curriculum assisting in meeting the OTD program goals and objectives. The team members will develop and submit a comprehensive research proposal to the Creighton Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the different levels of the assessment plan. Furthermore, the team will produce scholarship in the form of at least one article and/or presentation discussing the model and its implications for other academic institutions.

Final Products: This project will produce the following final products:

- Assessment plan for service learning/community-based learning in the OT curriculum that can be used throughout the health sciences
- Strong community partners that meet community needs and address student learning objectives
- Research proposal submitted to IRB

- Model for program
- Dissemination of the project model

Timeline:

| Activity | Outcome | Timeline |
|--|--|---|
| Development and sustainability of community partners | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustain community partnerships with Heart Ministry, Sacred Heart School, Healthy Families Project, etc • Explore and establish other potential community partners | Ongoing By the end of Spring 2008 semester |
| Explore assessment tools | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct literature review of relevant service learning assessment tools | By the end of March 2008 |
| Development of an assessment plan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment plan developed & submitted to IRB for approval | By the end of Spring 2008 semester |
| Develop a comprehensive model | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model developed for dissemination | Model development will be ongoing after the funding cycle of this grant |
| Submit a comprehensive research proposal | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research project submitted to IRB | By the end of Spring 2008 semester |
| Disseminate project model | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written article, poster & oral presentations | Ongoing |

Budget:

| Item | Cost | Justification |
|----------------------------------|--------|--|
| Student Community Leader Stipend | \$600 | Provide support for an OT student leader to assist in exploration of community partners and projects |
| Scholarly Resources | \$500 | Books and other media resources for assessment plan |
| SPSS software and licenses | \$400 | Software for analysis of assessment plan results and testing of potential assessment tools |
| Conference Travel | \$500 | Travel for dissemination of project model |
| Total | \$2000 | |

Sustainability: This project is ongoing and will continue to develop and grow. The funds will provide a jump start for the project which is in its infancy at this time.

References:

- Boyer, Ernest. (1996). The scholarship of engagement. *Journal of Public Outreach*, 1(1), 1-20.
- Goodrow, B., Olive, K.E., Behringer, B., Kelley, M.J., Bernard, B., Grover, S., Wachs, J. & Jones, J. (2001). The community partnerships experience: A report of institutional transition at East Tennessee State University. *Academic Medicine*, 76(2), 134-141.