



All Things Ignatian



Assessing Social Responsibility in Health Professions Students: Professional Formation in the Ignatian Context

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Background/Importance

Community-engaged learning has been recognized as an important resource in health professions education.¹ Aligned with this philosophy, the School of Pharmacy and Health Professions (SPAHP) has identified “Professional Formation and Critical Self-Reflection” and the Ignatian charism of “Women and Men for and with Others” as a core graduate outcome facilitated by community-engaged learning experiences. Exposure to underserved communities can foster health professionals’ essential skills, but explicit assessment of learning outcomes must be formalized in order for such co-curricular experiences to be valued by faculty and administrators. Several instruments have been identified that effectively assess learning dimensions during “general” service activities;² however, no standardized instruments exist to assess the effectiveness of participation in community service activities for health professions’ students.³ Research literature indicates that such standardized measures are needed to allow transferability across professions and institutions.

Project description

Students in the School of Pharmacy and Health Professions participate in many community engagement activities through the coordination of the Office of Interprofessional Scholarship, Service and Education (OISSE). In order to explore and measure student perceptions and value of participation in these community engagement activities, a two-phased project emerged.

Phase 1: Qualitative Study of Student Attitudes/Preliminary Survey

Since 2006, health professions students have participated in the Healthy Families program on a weekly to monthly basis each semester. The program is a family focused community-based outreach program designed to assist families with behavioral modifications to improve nutritional and exercise habits. Children who are obese or at risk for obesity and their families must be willing to make lifestyle changes to participate in the program. Working with Creighton faculty members, health professions students guide the exercise and nutrition components of the program.

This initial study involved the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data to explore participant perceptions about the value of a community engagement experience. Data collection tools included: quantitative survey, reflection questionnaire and focus group interviews. The outcomes from the quantitative survey revealed valuable information related to student perceptions of community engagement activities; however the survey’s methodological properties had not been established since it was adapted for use with health professions students. This led to Phase 2, the study to validate the survey instrument.

Sample survey questions:

“My involvement in serving the health needs of the community in which I live may have a significant societal impact (including but not limited to decreasing health disparities).”

“It is a moral obligation for a healthcare professional to provide community service.”

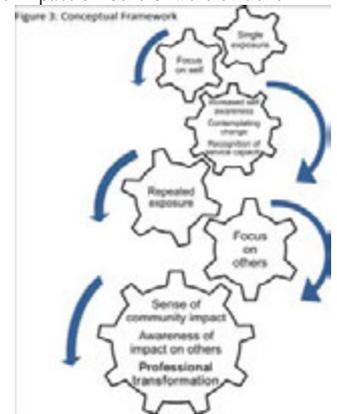
Phase 2: Assessment of the Impact of Community Engagement on Student Learning in the Health Professions:

Validation of a Survey Tool

Methods: With support from Creighton’s Office of Academic Excellence and Assessment, investigators revised the survey tool based on feedback from the pilot data in the 1st study. They then distributed the instrument to educational experts both locally and nationally, for content validation. Following a survey revision, based on feedback from the experts, utilization of the survey was expanded beyond the Healthy Families Project to be implemented with all OISSE-coordinated community engaged learning experiences (19) with occupational therapy, pharmacy and physical therapy students. This survey and a recognized “gold standard” (Community Service Attitudes Scale) were administered to students in September and December, 2010.

Outcomes

Phase 1: Following is a conceptual framework demonstrating the results of the study’s 1st phase. For students who participated in the community engagement activity during a single episode, the focus was on self. The students who participated in multiple sessions moved beyond self, and themes related to an awareness of the impact on others were evident.⁴



Phase 2:

The survey was administered to a total of 281 Pharmacy, Physical Therapy and Occupational Therapy students. Currently a confirmatory factor analysis is underway to determine construct validity, and statistical analyses will establish the instrument’s stability and calculate any change scores associated with student perceptions.

Key Points

- *Evidence indicates that social responsibility is enhanced in health professions students who participate in community engagement activities, particularly if participation occurs more than once.
- *A valid and reliable instrument is needed to assess the value of including community engagement activities in the curriculum.

References:
 1. Cauley K, et al. Service Learning: Integrating Student Learning a Community Service. *Education for Health*, 2001; 14: 173-181.
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 3. Stainke P, Fitch P. Assessing Service Learning. *Research and Practice in Assessment*, 2007; 1: 1-8.
 4. Furze, J, Black L, Peck K, Jensen GM. *Student perceptions of a community engagement experience: Exploration of reflections on social responsibility and professional formation*. *Physiotherapy Theory and Practice*. October 13, 2010 e-pub.