Teaching Strategies Showcase

Indiana University’s Teaching for Student Success

Module 6: High-Impact Practices

Title: High-Impact Service-Learning Project

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Location: IU Kokomo - Allied Health Services

# Context for this strategy

Indiana University Kokomo Health Sciences students and particularly those in Health Education and Promotion are taught basic research skills which are a part of the roles and responsibilities of a Certified Health Education Specialist (CHES; NCHEC.org), and important for a health education career. In their senior year, these students have participated and will continue to participate in a direct, research-based service-learning project with the local Howard County Health Department. This project fulfills one of the partners’ needs related to opioid and substance abuse harm reduction programs. This is considered a high-impact practice as the students conduct research to inform community health programs and address the needs of a local community partner.

# Materials needed to implement this strategy

Our community partner and I create a project outline and identify the research purpose related to the health program planning need. We plan the data collection and/or analysis, and report phases which are fine-tuned with the students in terms of learning outcomes, and project goals and feasibility. This ensures each partner contributes to project planning.

# Step-by-step implementation

## Co-create and tune the research purpose and phases

The community partner first shares their overall health program planning goals and research needs to shape the research question. For instance, in a previous project, the research purpose was to collect formative feedback on and apply changes to a community outreach survey (to update the survey in a way that is relevant to Howard County residents) and collect actual survey data from the residents to inform programs. In a more recent project, our partner was interested in exploring that collected survey data which provided insight into where to focus harm reduction education programs. Thus, our overarching research question was, “are there differences in substance or opioid use and harm reduction perceptions between demographic factors (such as age, sex, income, education or occupation groups)?”

As the instructor, I shape the data collection and/or analysis and reporting and receive feedback from the community partner and students. I also incorporate reflections in each phase. In the previous community outreach survey project, I broke down the overall project into four phases:

* introduction and preparation for the project (i.e., partner meeting, pilot survey development),
* data collection (i.e., collect and submit survey data and formative survey evaluation data), data analysis and survey changes (i.e., analyze formative evaluation data individually and as a group, and apply changes to the survey),
* project summary, and
* final partner meeting (i.e., complete individual report sections, finalize the draft as a group, and participate in sharing the report at the final partner meeting).

The students also provide feedback on data collection and/or analysis, and reporting methods. Whereas we begin with a general outline of the research purpose and procedures, our partner and I work with students to provide additional details to the procedures, such as sampling procedures, and formatting for the report. We also give them guidance and direct instruction on how to implement and submit each assignment at this time.

## Individualize and group assignments

To manage students’ fears of group work and grading, both individual and group assignments are incorporated in the class service-learning project. The students are graded as individuals in group assignments as well. For example, when the students analyze data, they do it individually, and then we analyze the data together as a group to finalize the results. If a student does not participate in or prepare for the group analysis and generation of the results, it does not affect other students’ scores. The students have preferred this approach because it incentivizes individual and group contributions toward the larger project purpose and goals.

## Evaluate quality and accuracy of assignments

When evaluating the assignments, I focus on the quality and accuracy of the submission. Specifically, quality components would be the extent to which the assignment is completed in enough detail to contribute the necessary materials to that part of the project. Accuracy components are evaluated based on the correctness of the whole and each component of the assignment tasks (e.g., data collection, input, analysis, or reporting).

# Student response to this strategy

## Recovery student reflections of experiences and skills

As the students complete each phase, they also complete reflections based on professional competencies relevant to the phase. For example, the students complete a reflection matrix with CHES professional competencies and skills related to health education and promotion research listed in the first column (e.g., Competency 4.2: Develop a Research Plan, Skill 7: Develop data collection procedures). In the next columns, they share their experiences or observations of the skills in previous courses and the current project, as well as their strengths and areas for improvement. Students also share their personal and professional growth experiences related to course learning objectives more broadly, such as their attitudes and perceptions of communicating with partners, planning meetings, and interviewing participants, and how the experiences might inform their career.

## Igniting passion for community health through applied learning

The students are generally passionate about contributing to community needs and making a difference in public health in Howard County. They learned about the purposes and benefits of harm reduction programs. For instance, a student shared, “I definitely have a better understanding of the [opioid] crisis and hope to continue to help in some way.” Another student shared, “I enjoyed doing this project because I felt I was contributing to an issue that is affecting our nation. I may have played a small role, but it was an important role.” The students also mentioned that they gained leadership and research skills to plan programs. One student summarized, “I have conducted a qualitative research study and presented it to stakeholders. I am capable of conducting the research, analyzing, coding, and delivering the material.”