Montague – CTE Scholar
Ranjita Misra (2004-2005)
Department of Health and Kinesiology

Community Needs and Strengths Assessment: Opportunities For Student Participation In The Classroom

The goal of this project was to incorporate community needs assessment research into the undergraduate classroom as an active learning project - one of the seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education. With a growing emphasis on undergraduate research and skills development, this project will take the students through the process that health educators use to identify gaps between current programs and required programs and place those needs (gaps in results) in a priority order. Hence, Dr. Misra incorporated a “Community Needs Assessment” project into the Community Health course (HLTH 331) as a pilot project geared toward Health Education students. The focus is on active learning, one of the seven principles of good practice in undergraduate education (Chickering, and Gamson, 1991), as it proposes to use hands-on skills development as part of their learning experience and coursework.

Needs Assessment: What is It?

Needs assessment is the process of collecting and analyzing information to develop and understand the issues, resources, and constraints of the target population, as related to the development of health promotion programs (McKenzie, Finger & Kotecki, 1998). In order to be successful, health educators must master the skills to do a community needs assessment and to identify problems, plan programs, gather the resources to carry out the plan, implement and evaluate to determine the success of the program.

Six-step Approach to Project Implementation

- Groups - Students were divided into groups of three or four and assigned a specific target population (adolescents, elderly, pregnant women, Hispanic male, minority women, etc).
- Gathering data – Formal and informal community leaders (as identified by Dr. Misra) were invited to share their expertise for delineating the problem and questions to be asked for specific target audience. Survey instrument was developed, finalized and pilot tested before data collection. Students completed face-to-face interviews and reviewed health records and current literature for service needs and demands of their target population.
- Data analysis - Using statistical software, students analyzed health issues and needs of their target population.
- Prioritizing Needs – Was done based on (1) importance, (2) modifiable, and (3) resources available.
- Validation of the Need – Feedback from formal and informal leaders confirmed the validity of their needs.
- Project presentation – The students, as part of the project evaluation, presented the information to their peers and formal/informal leaders (who were invited to attend the presentation and give their feedback).

Meeting the Objectives of Center for Teaching Excellence

- The community needs assessment met one of the Centers for Teaching Excellence most important goals i.e., excellence in learning and scholarship to promote a superior undergraduate experience; Dr. Misra continues to implement this project in her Community Health course.
- This active learning project allowed the students an opportunity to conduct both primary and secondary data collection and familiarized them with gathering data from target audience, analyzing the data collected, prioritizing the identified needs, as well as abstracting information concisely.
- Provided a model to improve the student’s understanding of community health problems.
- Students presented project results at the Student Research Week, Texas A&M University.
- Provided the opportunity to network with leaders in the field and professionals to find internships, jobs, or explore graduate schools.
- Allowed collaboration between departmental faculty (Dr. Misra and Dr. Ballard), presentation, and publication of this project in a high impact journal.