Chapter 21

Globalizing and Localizing:
Creating an Introductory Public Health Course and Online Learning Environment (A Case Study)

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ABSTRACT

Public health is a demanding field that draws from a number of disciplines: medicine, veterinary medicine, nutrition, nursing, law enforcement, research, policy-making, engineering, and public outreach and education. The nature of this field requires multi-media educational resources that can introduce diverse learners to this curricular and real-world complexity. This chapter describes how a virtual team of faculty members from four Kansas institutions of higher learning collaborated to create an online course titled “Introduction to Public Health”. Drawing from the larger environment, the online course uses global and culturally sensitive techniques to reach a wide learner base and to make use of local resources for its geographically diverse learners. The online learning environment constructed is tied in a deliberate fashion to the values and practices of public health. The online course is built to be more widely adoptable by a range of faculty members from different related fields. As a result, students from rural, urban, and suburban backgrounds will have an opportunity to learn public health and related careers early in their undergraduate education. Public universities and community colleges will have access to a new collaborative model for course development and delivery. This course build involved a consistent tactic of building learning adaptable to local and culturally variant conditions for global transferability, with some of these practices transferable to other online course builds. This chapter explores the uses of research and design in a specific case to enhance the global inheritability of the shared course.

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INTRODUCTION

Public health is the science and practice of promoting health and preventing disease in communities. Public health workers accomplish these objectives through education, the promotion of healthy behaviors, the prevention and control of communicable diseases, and surveillance of environmental hazards.

An efficient and effective public health system requires an appropriately trained workforce of sufficient size to meet current and future needs. It is acknowledged widely that the mission of the public health workforce is evolving as the result of ongoing social, economic, technological, and demographic changes (Institute of Medicine, 2003). In 2003, a committee convened by the National Academies of Sciences and Institute of Medicine concluded that public health education for the 21st century must include training not only in the traditional core areas of epidemiology, biostatistics, environmental health, health services administration, social sciences, and behavioral sciences, but also in eight new content areas, including informatics, communication, cultural competence, and global health.

The dynamic needs of the public health workforce and the multidisciplinary nature of public health give rise to the need for multi-media educational resources that can be used to update the current public health workforce and to introduce outside audiences to this complex and growing field. This chapter describes a virtual team of faculty from four institutions of higher learning (in Kansas) which collaborated in a blended way to create an online course entitled “Introduction to Public Health”, based upon a curriculum recommended by the Council of Colleges of Arts and Sciences (Riegelman, Albertine, & Persily, 2007). The course uses global and culturally sensitive techniques to reach a wider learner base and to introduce local resources for its diverse learners; it also involved building an online learning environment tied to the values and practices of public health. This portal course (a “gateway” course to full-fledged degree programs) leads to a larger program of undergraduate and graduate studies in public health. It was built to be widely adoptable by a range of faculty members from different related fields.

LITERATURE SURVEY

Public health and food safety are significant concerns at the community, state, national, and global levels. Over the past decade, the traditional mission of the public health workforce has been expanded. All public health professionals, including those employed in agriculture and veterinary medicine, are now expected to be prepared for and responsive to large-scale public health emergencies, such as the following: bioterrorism threats; natural disasters; global outbreaks of food-borne illness, endemic or emerging infectious diseases; and the societal burdens associated with chronic debilitating diseases attributable to increased consumption of nutrient-poor foods with high levels of sugar and saturated fats, and reduced physical activity (Hoblet, Maccabe, & Heider, 2002; Perlino, 2006). The ability of public health practitioners to protect human populations from health threats can be enhanced through partnerships with professionals and institutions focused on business, agriculture, medicine, and environmental sciences. In addition, the study of public health has gained increased recognition as a solid foundation for employment or postgraduate study in a wide variety of fields with the potential to benefit from the “population perspective” intrinsic to public health. Such fields include food safety and security, environmental science and management, human services and international affairs (Hoblet et al., 2002; Riegelman, Teitelbaum, & Persily, 2002).

Ironically, a supply shortfall in the public health workforce is emerging while the demand and expectations for educated public health
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