**Final Synthesis Paper**

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UNIV679: Introduction to Community Engaged Scholarship

Community Engagement Graduate Certificate E-Portfolio

Introduction

The community engagement graduate certificate has provided me with opportunities to learn new material as well as reflect on my past community engagement experiences as an engaged scholar. The following paragraphs will synthesize my experiences learning and engaging-in community engaged scholarship through my course work, research, and immersion experiences.

Community Engagement-related course work

I’ve had the opportunity to learn new material as well as build on to my previous community engagement knowledge throughout my participation in the community engagement graduate certificate. More specifically, it has been through the UNIV679 course, Introduction to Community Engaged Scholarship (CES) that I have learned a wide range of topics associated with community engagement. One topic that I was able to learn more about was CES in an academic setting and what it meant to be a community engaged professional (CEP) in academia. Previously, I associated community engagement with just those working in a community to promote a specific topic or concern, but I never thought of anything past that, such as how those in academia can be CES and ensure that the community is also getting something out of the partnership. To be a CEP is to be a person who engages the community in some aspect, whether that is through conducting health classes once a week for community members or promoting community member involvement in conducting health screening events. CEP is someone who takes the time to learn about a community as well as works to promote a better life in whichever capacity that may be for the community at hand. Similar to what was talked about a few classes later into the semester, sustainability is also another topic that comes to mind when reflecting on the meaning of a CEP in academia. When speaking about sustainability, one might think of it as how a community will sustain the program or project that has been implemented after a CEP leaves. There are many instances where a CEP might think that the community is responsible for sustaining the project or program, but for optimal success, the CEP needs to reflect and create a sustainability plan for the community once it is no longer lead by the CEP.

Another topic that I found very insightful was the importance of partnerships in promoting CES. This class topic provided me with new ways to approach potential community partners. A few weeks after we discussed this topic, we read an article by Bobby Heagerty who discussed a bit about competition between potential partners. This stood out to me as it related to the previous class topic on partnerships, and made me ponder on different ways to overcome this problem (a problem that I did not know existed until discussed in this class). One way that I believe that one can overcome this is that perhaps the partnership could review their missions and goals together prior to moving forward with the partnership, and outline what they hope to accomplish. This would allow both parties to understand the intentions of the partnership and would ensure that goals of both parties are met.

Another topic that I was able to learn more about were the community characteristics that facilitate CES. I found the information shared by speaker, Rita Landgraf to be valuable in providing us with different characteristics when discussing the partnership for healthy communities. A few key words that I wrote down from her presentation were connecting, building, engaging, and informing. These characteristics are a few that I hope to use as a checklist with my future partnerships, to ensure that both partners are mutually benefiting. This speaker also reminded me of the component three from the da Cruz article that was discussed in one of the first classes of the semester. Component three encompasses the idea that scholars need to create two- way streets with their community partners to ensure a successful program or implementation, and I believe that this component is the most important to promote in my field of research.

Another important topic that I was happy to learn more about was where to find support when trying to live as an engaged scholar. I believe that the different forms of support needed to be successful as well as an engaged scholar is dependent on one’s position at a university. For example, I believe that my needed support is likely different than a professor’s needed support. I found value in learning more about the different ways to find support, and how my colleagues have also struggled with this problem as well coming from different disciplines. From what we have discussed in class over the past many weeks, it sounds like it can be difficult for professors to promote in engaged scholarship while trying to submit papers and achieve tenure. I think if a university were to express the importance of engaged scholarship and support faculty in the process, I believe that both professors and graduate students may be more inclined to be an engaged scholar through the support of the university.

One of the last speakers we had, Nancy Karibjanian, spoke about the significance of op-eds, another topic that I was unfamiliar with. I did not fully see the connection between CES and writing an op-ed at the time, but I can see the importance of using op-eds to reach community populations, or to connect with specific sub-populations who may not have otherwise had access or understood what an article was discussing or how it is associated with them. I now see op-eds as a way to get communities engaged and promote different topics in ways that are suitable for each population.

Knowledge gained through research experiences

Through all of the knowledge that I have gained during my time as a student at the University of Delaware, I’ve been able to reflect on my past and current research experiences, to consider the times where I did a good job contributing to CES, and other times when I could have done a better job at promoting CES.

One topic that I have been able to utilize in my research is the importance of partnerships. After the lecture on partnerships, I was able to reflect more on the characteristics of a good partnership, and if my past partnerships shared the same characteristics. At the moment, my research team consists of professors across disciplines (and universities). After reflecting, I found that my team could potentially do a better job at reviewing our goals and intentions before jumping into a project. As a graduate student I have found it difficult to promote this idea among my team of professors as it seems like another step we would have to take, but I believe it is an important step to ensure that there are less challenges later down the road.

I also found that ethics and IRB is also a key aspect of community engagement. I knew the basics of IRB as I have taken a few human rights protection courses, but I found it very valuable to learn a bit more about additional ethical considerations through hearing Maria Palazuelos-Jorganes speak about ethics and the IRB in a community engagement context. It was a great refresher, ultimately making me think a bit deeper about my own research and it made me reflect on which ethical considerations I could do a better job at promoting in my research.

Another topic of community engagement that I am continuing to promote in my research is disseminating my achievements in engaged scholarship through submitting my work to peer-reviewed journals. It is important to document your accomplishments in engaged scholarship because it is crucial that all researchers are able to acknowledge that there are many individuals out there who are able to promote engaged scholarship through their research and initiatives. As mentioned previously, it seems that it can be easy to get caught up in achieving tenure and forgetting about engaged scholarship in the process. I think it is important that there is literature on engaged scholarship, so it is known how different individuals have contributed to engaged scholarship through their research. This would also be beneficial for individuals who might have a more difficult time in promoting engaged scholarship, so they can acknowledge that scholars have found a way to promote engage scholarship in their field. I also believe that it would be beneficial for scholars looking for different ways to promote engaged scholarship in their research to have a place to review the literature and brainstorm ideas based on what has been done in the past. Also, I believe that the more literature on accomplishments of engaged scholarship, the less likely that engaged scholarship will be considered a foreign idea to those who do not actively pursue it.

Knowledge gained through immersion experiences

I have also had the privilege to participate in many immersion experiences that have acted as opportunities for me to either learn new material or apply what I have learned during my time in this certificate. One example that comes to mind is the engaged scholarship symposium that the University of Delaware was able to provide to their faculty as well as their students as a way to learn more about engaged scholarship. One speaker that made an impact on my views of engage scholarship were Tim Eatman. I thought that Tim brought up a lot of great points about society at the moment, as well as how many scholars have shrunk their imagination due to the difficulty to resist from conforming to basic disciplinary rules and guidelines. I also enjoyed his five senses of engagement, and I believe that these five topics should be further discussed in institutions. I also hope to bring these five senses of engagement to my own research as I have not thought about my education and research in a way that covers all five of these senses. It was also great to see how those in different disciplines were utilizing engaged scholarship, it broadened my awareness of how CES varies in different fields.

Another immersion experience where I have been able to apply my CES knowledge has been through attending the American Public Health Association (APHA) conferences. These conferences have provided me with the opportunitiy to further reflect on professional engaged service, and if there were any aspects of being an engaged service professional that I could improve. I believe that this is also associated with what Dr. Getchell was alluding to when she presented in one of our classes, as it relates promoting CES through participation in national organizations.

Future goals as a community engaged professional and community member

Even though I will soon be graduating from my Master’s degree in Health Promotion as well as my Graduate Certificate in Community Engagement, my interests in being a community engaged scholar continues to grow every day. My future aspirations consist of obtaining a doctorate degree, specializing in global health, and using my degrees to create and implement different health programs for populations that are considered vulnerable. I hope use all of the material and knowledge learned during this certificate to ensure that future communities will be provided a beneficial and valuable experience while working with my research team. I have learned a lot while working towards this certificate, and I hope to live out my aspirations as a community engaged scholar would. I'm excited to have the tools and materials needed from my experiences and the courses that I've taken as a relates to community engaged scholarship, that I can reflect back on in times when community engagement seems far out of reach. I appreciate all of the work that our professors have continued to promote in the field of community engaged scholarship, and they have been great role models for both myself and my colleagues throughout our time in the certificate. I hope that as I continue to grow and develop my skills in the behavioral health field, that I will put community engaged scholarship at the forefront.