

TITLE: The WOU Community Health + Polk County COVID-19 Project: Learning by Doing

AUTHOR(S): Jenny Leon-Perez, B.S., Daniel P. Dowhower, PhD, MPH, Megan Patton-Lopez, PhD, MPH, and Emily Vala-Haynes, PhD, MPH

PRESENTER(S): Daniel P. Dowhower, PhD, MPH, Jenny Leon-Perez, B.S.

STUDENT SUBMISSION: Yes

TOPIC/TARGET AUDIENCE: Public Health Educators that teach at the university level as well as in the field

ABSTRACT: The Experiential Learning Cycle (Kolb, 1984) serves as a pedagogical framework to assess the impact of “learning by doing”. In the face of COVID-19, Public Health Faculty at Western Oregon University applied this framework and developed The WOU Community Health + Polk County COVID-19 Project. A qualitative study using a semi-structured interview to collect demographic information and data assessing the cycles of Experiential Learning Cycle: (1) assessment of actual versus expected experience; (2) reflections on how the experience was consistent/inconsistent with public health knowledge acquired during major studies; (3) discussion of how the experience impacted student conceptualization and understanding of public health; and, (4) hypotheses about how students might apply this experience to future experiences. Participants were 26 public health students that completed the project. Results suggest the opportunity for experiential learning exceeded student expectations; a new found understanding for the relevance and importance of coursework; clarification, understanding of and strengthened commitment to public health; and many indicated an advantage in the work place while others identified it as motivation for advanced degrees in public health. Experiential learning has implications for a well-prepared work force and the development of educational leaders in the field.

OBJECTIVE(S): Learning Objective(s): 1. Identify a pedagogical framework to support the development of experiential learning opportunities for students. 2. Evaluate the role of experiential learning as a valuable way to connect with public health students of the 21st century.
