Western Oregon University + Polk County Covid-19 Project: Placing Public Health Students at the Intersection of Science and Practice

OPHA Panel Presentation
10/11/2021

Maddie Dirren BS, Daniel Dowhower Ph.D., MPH, Jenny Leon-Perez BS, Megan Patton-López Ph.D., RDN, Jacqui Umstead BSN, Kristty Zamora-Polanco MPH, & Emily Vala-Haynes Ph.D., MPH
Panel Introductions

Maddie Dirren, BS
Co-Project Coordinator
Western Oregon University

Kristty Zamora- Polanco, MPH
Epidemiologist
Polk County Public Health

Daniel Dowhower, Ph.D., MPH
Assistant Professor
Western Oregon University
Overview of Presentation

- Introduction to the WOU + Polk County Covid-19 Project
- Overview of the project’s strategies and outcomes to date
- Discussion on workforce needs of a local public health and the role of the project to support Covid-19 response.
- Review of student satisfaction and learning outcomes associated with participation in the WOU + Polk County Covid-19 Project
Western Oregon University Community Health + Polk County COVID-19 Project
University-Community Collaboration

Helping at the WOU Move In Days event.

With Kristy Zamora-Polanco, Polk County Health Services & WOU alumna

Volunteering at a Polk County testing event.
Our Goal

Provide coordinated communication and community engagement efforts that ensure vulnerable populations have access to accurate and timely information to protect their health and safety.
WOU
Area Health Services & Clinics
Local Community Based-Organizations
Oregon Health Authority
Polk County Health Services
WOU Community COVID-19 Project Team
Contact Tracing - By the Numbers

- **9** current contact tracers (29 since July 2020)
- **4** bilingual contact tracers
- **2** languages spoken (Spanish and English)
- **65** hours of contact support per week
- **5,682** individuals have been contact traced since September 1, 2020
Education & Outreach Primary Audiences

- Older Adults
- Latinx Families
- WOU Campus
Our Outreach Work

**Older Adults**

- **COVID-19 Vaccine: A Look Into The Future**
  - My Vaccine Experience
  - Vaccine Experience
  - Vaccine Numbers

- **COVID-19 Vaccine: The Next Steps**
  - Vaccine Experience
  - Vaccine Experience
  - Vaccine Numbers

12 Materials, 3,000+ newsletters, 10 community partners

**Latinx Families**

- **Juntos en Salud**
  - Together In Health
  - TOGETHER IN HEALTH

27 Materials, 2,750+ newsletters, 20 community partners

Together we THRIVE
Our Outreach Work Continued

**WOU Campus**

- **35 Materials,**
- **5 community partners**

**Data Briefs**

- **November, 2020**
  - COVID-19 Project Data Brief
- **February, 2021**
  - COVID-19 Project Data Brief
- **May, 2021**
  - COVID-19 Project Data Brief
Undergraduate Student Development

**Public Health Skills**
- Data visualization
- Health Communication
  - Diverse & bilingual audiences
- Health Literacy
- Program Planning & Implementation
- Program Evaluation

**Soft Skills**
- Communication
- Flexibility
- Leadership
- Public speaking
- Resourcefulness
- Team work
- Time management
- Technology
  - Canva, Excel
The Local Public Health Authority perspective
Overview of Presentation

- Polk County Public Health Overview
- COVID-19 Response
- Collective Impact
- Workforce Development
Polk County Overview

1. Demographics
   A. Population: 83,805
   B. County seat: Dallas
   C. Largest city: West Salem
   D. Largest population: 57.8%, ages 18-64
   E. Largest minority group: 13.1% Hispanic/Latino
Polk County Organizational Structure

Board of Commissioners

County Administrator

Health Services

Adult Behavioral Health

Youth & Family Behavioral Health

Public Health

Administrative Services
Polk County Public Health Overview

01 Direct Services
- Women, Infants & Children (WIC)
- Reproductive Health
- Immunizations
- Home Visiting
- Jail Medical

02 Surveillance & Investigation
- Communicable Diseases
- Animal Bites and Rabies
- Community Health Assessment

03 Community Engagement/Outreach
- Emergency Preparedness
- Maternal Child Health/ Title V
- Oregon Mother’s Care
- Tobacco Prevention & Education
- Community Health Improvement Plan
Polk County Public Health Overview

Nurse Practitioner/Registered Nurses
Reproductive Health; Immunizations; Home Visiting; Communicable Disease

Public Health Workers
COVID-19 Case Investigation; other reportable disease investigation

Community Health Coordinator
Community engagement activities

Epidemiologist/Preparedness Coordinator
Epidemiological report; Public Health emergency preparedness program

Support Staff
Vital records, billing, medical assistant, WIC staff, reception
COVID-19 Response

1. Case Investigation and Contact Tracing
2. Public Information
3. Supporting Testing
4. Support logistical needs of the health system
5. Operational and policy decision making
6. Guidance for schools, businesses, and community at large
Collective Impact

1. Extended partnership with other LPHA’s
2. Health Systems Partnership
3. Community Based Organizations
4. WOU Community Health + Polk County COVID-19 Project
Workforce Development

- Communicating ideas and information
- Addressing the needs of diverse population
- Managing change in response to dynamic, evolving circumstances
- Applying quality improvement concepts in their work
- Interpretation of public health data
- Collaborating with diverse communities
Concluding Remarks
Program evaluation of student satisfaction and learning outcomes associated with participation in the WOU + Polk County Covid-19 Project

Daniel Dowhower Ph.D.
Overview of Presentation

- A Pandemic Fills a need....
- Student led program evaluation project
- Student identified learning outcomes
- Concluding comments
A Pandemic fills a need

- “I have a huge passion for health disparities and serving underserved populations and, of course, infectious disease so that's how I came to apply for this internship.”
- “In all honesty, either... I fake my internship, do a bunch of projects ... for a health program that you may or may not ever run, I wanted real experience...working with Dr.s VH and PL ... I was ready to just go to war with them over this.”
Who participated?

- Eligible upon exiting the project
- Formally contacted via email and phone
- Consent and demographic survey completed prior to 45 minute interview
- Conducted via Zoom/audio transcription

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<th>Category</th>
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<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
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<td>Asian/PI</td>
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Student Led Evaluation Project

- Undergraduate student new to project (Winter 2021) was lead student evaluator.
- Dr. Dowhower lead the evaluation project to support Co-Directors.

Student’s Role:

- Developed semi-structured interview instrument
- Pilot testing and editing
- Interviewer training
- Real-time interviewing
- Editing of transcripts
- Coding and codebook development
## Skills Developed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication with - general public</th>
<th>Active Listening, Tone, Being Real, recognizing it's not about you, working with ESL populations, making a positive contribution by not giving advice or lecturing, working to help others deal with not only COVID but other essential resources.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- with professionals</td>
<td>Exchange of knowledge and skill to help make better strategy, interpersonal communication, an understanding the difference for speaking and writing professionally; communication that leverage technology and resources to improve community well-being.</td>
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<td>- with team members</td>
<td>Interaction with supervisors; ask for feedback/clarification; comfort saying I don’t know</td>
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<td>Team building</td>
<td>Learning to work together, assign roles, reach out to others for help, not overlapping work, self-awareness about how one communicates with others, development of a communication dynamic that allows for confidence in reaching out to others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of Academics</td>
<td>Having the necessary professional KSAs and translating academic coursework to real life.</td>
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“A lot of our communication was through zoom so I was able to professionally meet with Community partners through or remote access and just learning how to speak professionally using terminology” ..... “It definitely lit a fire under my belly...it wasn't until I did the internship that I felt a burning passion for public health, even though I was public health major.”

“I believe team building is .... fundamental... because we all work in teams...we need...open communication... good relationships with our coworkers, supervisors, because without that...we're not going to be able to distribute necessary information or the resources we need”
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Benefits Experienced</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sense of belonging</td>
<td>Feeling connected to the division/university at large, feeling accepted, fitting in with other students and deeper relationships with professors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td>Putting yourself out there, to be flexible, responsible and deliver on responsibilities, being stretched by responsibilities one does not feel ready for, feeling connected to the purpose or goal of public health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional maturity</td>
<td>Developing self-understanding about one’s thoughts and behaviors and how they impact situations that might be trying or challenging. Maintaining professionalism, handling difficult difficult people, taking time and having constructive conversations. Open to feedback, handling difficult situations, developing strategies for not taking things personally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Listening, critical thinking, conflict resolution, open to continual learning, time management, scheduling, planning, implementation, delegation, task completion, motivating/empathy</td>
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*Western Oregon University*

*Public Health*

*Together we THRIVE*
"I think like the biggest part was contact tracing and making those connections with community partners...my new job[is similar]...making connections with the providers and...professionals that's something I took from the project."

"It taught me how to work as a team and taught me how to work with different businesses in the Community.”...“I think everyone has to have a little bit of empathy during this project, because you got to kind of put yourself in the population you're targeting shoes and know how to reach them I guess."
# Student Challenges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Moving outside of comfort zone</strong></th>
<th>doing things one is not comfortable doing, push yourself in unfamiliar places, to do things that you wouldn't normally do, trying things you never tried before and challenging oneself and improving one's skill set.</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Life balance</strong></td>
<td>learning how to arrange one's work responsibilities, student responsibilities, and personal time in order maximize personal health and satisfaction while remaining productive and successful.</td>
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<td><strong>Lack of experience</strong></td>
<td>generally speaking,a lack of knowledge, skill, or insight gained from experience.</td>
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Challenge Quotes

“I've always been a shy person...it is really tough to talk to strangers, especially if I'm cold calling them like I was for contact tracing.. it was really valuable being pushed into that role, because, by the end of my time with the internship I felt really confident in myself.”

“The main challenge for me was time management...I was taking a couple of online classes, working , and the project ..trying to balance..work to pay bills... be an active participant... carrying my weight...and whatnot.”
Concluding Remarks

The COVID project, for students, led to:

- A deeper connection to the department and university
- A deeper experience directly related to Public Health
- An experience that translated into a competitive skill set

In conclusion, reproducing this program would be a challenge, but begs an important set of questions:

- Is it possible to produce similar meaningful in class experiences?
- How can we create opportunities of different lengths across time?
- What, if anything, are the implications for Public Health programs and internship requirements?
Thank you!

Learn more about our project by visiting our website: https://wou.edu/hexs/community-health-polk-county-covid-19-project/
Email us at: communityhealth@mail.wou.edu