Nurs 4813 Special Topics: Minority Health Disparities
Kathleen M. Barta, EdD, RN
University of Arkansas
http://nurs.uark.edu

ABSTRACT:
Minority health disparities is the focus of a semester long course that includes a service learning component and student participation in a statewide minority health conference. Students from a variety of health relevant majors, including nursing, pre-medicine, social work, and anthropology engage in weekly face-to-face discussion about the social determinants of health. Current data sources are used to examine trends at the local, state, and national levels. Students use examples from their own communities and service learning experiences to deepen their understanding of the social determinants of health.

EDUCATIONAL METHODS OR APPROACHES USED:
The class meets once a week for two hours to discuss models of health disparities and the needs of a variety of populations. Students are also accountable for 12 hours of service learning. They choose the site and are responsible for gaining entry and engaging in contributions needed at the site. They maintain a log of their hours and a reflective journal. Students select a population of interest and a health disparity issue. They conduct a review of the literature and prepare a poster that highlights the population and the health disparity. They also suggest advocacy approaches to reduce the disparity. In the class they also view and discuss the following videos:

Unnatural Causes (http://www.unnaturalcauses.org/), and

The course uses Blackboard to facilitate access to course materials, discussions, and online resources. Dr. Thomas Lavie, the author of the textbook used in the course, is credited with helping the faculty member design an effective course. His passion and commitment to the next generation of health care providers and researchers is laudable. He also generously shared course support materials. See http://www.minorityhealth.com/. Students attend the Arkansas Minority Health conference held each year and present their advocacy posters to the public and interact with professionals in the field as well as community members. The course also may be taken for honors or graduate credit. In those cases students also do a class presentation.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:
In 2007, the University of Arkansas Office of Institutional Diversity released a small grants request for proposals for curriculum innovations related to diversity. The proposal for the course was selected for funding. The funds were used to draft the course syllabus, to pay an outside reviewer to offer suggestions on improvements, and to conduct a focus group with the first group of students at the end of the course.

The course was designed to offer a deeper look at the social determinants of health and to engage the creative thinking of students in designing advocacy efforts to reduce disparities. The course supplements content and experiences currently integrated in the undergraduate professional program of study in nursing. The course is offered annually during the spring semester to coincide with the state minority health conference and is part of the assigned faculty member's teaching load. A key factor in the success is the service learning component and the expectation that students share their work in poster format at
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the annual Minority Health conference. The authentic learning activity that requires students to present their work in a public forum provides motivation beyond course grades. The diversity of the student population in terms of age, gender, major, and life experience makes for a lively engaging class. Students share experiences from their home communities that illustrate how the social determinates of health impact the quality of life. Many students also express an appreciation for what they come to see as privilege.

The University of Arkansas Eleanor Mann School of Nursing offers an upper division undergraduate bachelor of science degree program to prepare nurse generalists and a graduate master of science degree program with concentrations in nursing education and adult clinical nurse specialist practice. Health promotion is a major curricular concept in both programs.

The School of Nursing collaborates with faculty in the College of Education and Health Professions and community leaders who plan the annual Arkansas Minority Health Conference. Students also complete their service learning requirements in a variety of community-based settings including a federally funded health clinic, local food banks, and community centers. The Arkansas Minority Health Commission sponsored the first Minority Health Summit in 2010. Students were able to hear a panel of past surgeons and meet Dr. Laveist, the author of Minority Populations and Health: An Introduction to Health Disparities in the United States, the text used in the course. They also heard an inspiring keynote talk by Dr. Camara Jones from the CDC.

This year the Arkansas Minority Health Commission loaned students high quality blood pressure equipment to use in screening events as part of the students' service learning projects. The faculty coordinator for the course and along with Jules Beck, PhD, Clinical Assistant Professor of Workforce Development, serve as co-PIs on a grant that includes support for the preparation of the students' posters and registration support for attending the annual Minority Health conference. The funds for the grant come from the Arkansas Tobacco Settlement Commission.

HEALTHY PEOPLE OBJECTIVE ADDRESSED:
ECBP-12-16: Increase the inclusion of core clinical prevention and population health content in health professions education.

PROGRAM OR COURSE GOALS:

Number of students enrolled/participating in 2010-2011 school year: 21

NURS 4813 Special Topics: Minority Health Disparities: Examine trends in and factors contributing to minority health disparities in the United States and Arkansas. Consider strategies that help reduce health disparities. The course is three credits and includes 12 hours of service learning and participation in the annual minority health conference. The course is open to graduate, undergraduate, and honors students in any major.

Course Goals: 1. Define the scope of the problem of health disparities among minority populations. 2. Review the evidence base for health disparities. 3. Analyze factors contributing to health disparities. 4. Examine personal attitudes in cross-cultural situations. 5. Examine strategies for reducing health disparities. 6. Develop an advocacy plan for a selected minority health disparity issue.

Did you conduct a needs assessment as part of your planning process?  
☐ Yes  ☒ No
PROFESSIONS INVOLVED:

Lead faculty is an associate professor in nursing. Students' majors included nursing, pre-medical, psychology, biology, African-American studies, and anthropology. Faculty on the minority health conference planning committee represented nursing, medical anthropology, gerontology, and workforce development.

LESSONS LEARNED/EVALUATION RESULTS:

An initial challenge was marketing the course as an elective across majors. After the first two offerings word of mouth advertising and increased awareness by advisors resulted in an increase in enrollment from 8 in year one to 21 in year three. Allowing students to select sites and make arrangements for their service learning experiences was more successful than pre-arranging the sites. Local sites included a newly opened campus food bank, a local community center serving immigrant populations, a local health clinic serving an immigrant population, and a regional food bank. By having the students present their work in a public forum they are able to interact with working professionals in the field who can serve as a beginning professional network for them. The students' knowledge products, in the form of poster presentations, become more valuable to them; not something done just for a grade. Faculty have also been impressed with the trust students develop among themselves that allows them to raise and explore issues related to the social determinants of health that are often avoided in everyday conversations including issues of racism and discrimination.

The initial two class offerings provided important group service learning contribution to a community site. Students assisted in chart reviews to prepare a database of information about chronic disease outcomes for a vulnerable population. The community site used the data in grant applications that ultimately benefitted the vulnerable population. Students report that participation in the minority health conference allows them to talk with professionals who share their passion. Students begin their professional networks that may serve them following graduation. A student from the first year presented a mock-up of a booklet for pregnant women from the Marshall Islands, an underserved population in the local community. Her work provided additional impetus for a local advocacy group to develop a general welcome booklet that was funded by the Arkansas Minority Health Commission, http://www.arminorityhealth.com/programs.html.

Another student from the first year went on to work as a volunteer at the Jones Center for Families, the community site where several of the students did their service learning hours. The Center serves a diverse community with many immigrant families.

A student from the most recent class was inspired by her involvement with community health advocates to look beyond her "little happiness in such things as shopping" to the "bigger happiness" of giving her time to volunteer to help vulnerable populations.

A student with second language skills learned about opportunities for working as a translator with vulnerable populations and used his skills to assist an immigrant woman to finally be able to sign her name. The student's journal reflection following the experience indicates the depth of his learning: "Now that E. learned to sign her name, she can access new opportunities. E. wasn't lazy or slow or foolish, she simply was not given an opportunity that is basic and standard to our experience. Although we take for granted both the physical and emotional consequences of this simple act, for E. it provides a footing upon which she can become a more developed person with an expanded skill set...[she] also becomes a tool to help lift and serve others...We need to be active in listening to the struggles of others and refrain from applying our own reality to the reality of someone else."

The faculty member who designed the course was honored by the College of Education and Health Professions with the 2009-2010 Innovative Teaching Award as a result of the course's success. See
Advice for faculty who might replicate the project: inventory the local community for groups that serve vulnerable populations. Engage in conversations about how students can provide meaningful help while learning alongside other professionals. The national call to increase interdisciplinary education supports finding ways to bring students together so that the various roles of health care providers are understood before graduation. Consider campus volunteer coordinating centers who may already have lists and contacts of community settings that serve vulnerable populations.

Tap the energy and interest of the students by offering a range of options for how the course outcomes can be completed. Giving students choices allows them to bring a higher level of commitment to their work. Create authentic learning activities that provide outside audiences for the students' work so that their motivation for good thinking is enhanced. Consider speaking to student organizations for the various disciplines as a way to raise the issue of disparities as well as market the course.

Consider a collaboration with a graduate student in a nursing education program who could assist in course development and implementation as part of a teaching practicum course or teaching assistantship. The opportunity to design a course would be of tremendous value to the student as well as help the faculty. Another avenue could be to design the course as a continuing education offering for nurses and other health professionals who are interested in the issue of disparities. Divisions of Continuing Education or local AHEC (Area Health Education Centers) may be able to provide technical support for program development.

CONCLUSION:

Student engagement with people who face health disparities is a powerful experience. The value of the service learning component is a key factor in the success of the course and is captured in a quote from one of the student's journal entries: "Perhaps the most interesting piece of experience that I learned from this week’s service learning is that every person perceives and interprets their world and the causal factors within it to be different. With this experience in mind, I am even more convinced than before of the importance of involving the everyday people from your target populations in your plans for interventions and advocacy." Such lessons will serve students well in their future work as health professions.

COMPANION MATERIALS: (Course syllabi, resource lists, tests, website, etc.)

NURS 4813 Special Topics: Minority Health Disparities syllabus. The syllabus is a standard format that includes course description, outcomes, evaluation methods, and calendar.

Grading rubric for service learning log and sample log format. The log format provides an overview of the time spent in search setting. The journal grading rubric guides the student preparation of their entries.

Grading rubric for poster presentation: The poster grading rubric guides the student preparation of his/her advocacy posters and participation at the conference.

Sample Student Poster

List of websites. These websites are high value locations that supplement classroom activities.

PUBLICATIONS:

Healthy People 2020 and Education For Health
Successful Practices for Clinical Health Professions

SECONDARY AUTHOR(S):

CONTACT:
Kathleen M. Barta, EdD, RN
Associate Professor
University of Arkansas
School of Nursing
1 University
Fayetteville, AR 72701
(479)575-5871
kbarta@uark.edu