

A New Pathway for KCKCC Students

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Abstract

A new course is being offered at KCKCC which introduces students to the career field of Public Health. This course is part of a national effort to meet the future needs to improve the health of Americans, and was developed as part of a program called "Pathways to Public Health" which has one goal of recruiting community college students for a fast-track bachelors/masters degree program in Public Health that is being developed at Kansas State University. The collaborative effort of several community colleges and Kansas State University is documented here.

Recently I had the opportunity to participate in an innovative grant-funded initiative to develop an online course, *Introduction to Public Health*, collectively with faculty from Kansas State University (K-State), Johnson County Community College (JCCC), Dodge City Community College (DCCC) and Kansas City Kansas Community College (KCKCC). The course is one part of a larger initiative, "Pathways to Public Health" which is partially funded by a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Higher Education Challenge Grant. The Pathways to Public Health initiative is a branch of the "One Health Kansas" program at Kansas State University, which is a component of "The One Health Initiative" which is a national movement to forge co-equal, all inclusive collaborations between physicians, veterinarians, and other scientific-health related disciplines.

The Pathways to Public Health program was created to recruit and retain students historically underrepresented in the food and agriculture sciences workforce. The program offers students in the participating community colleges as well as those already attending Kansas State University an opportunity to explore career options in the public health related professions early in their educational training. The scope of careers in the public health arena is broad, and often students are unaware of possible career pathways, therefore one of the major goals of this program is to expose the students to a sampling of those careers. The program is also designed to help students with their transition from a community college to Kansas State University. Therefore, one component of the program is to bring the students to the K-State campus in a summer immersion experience course with funding provided for those with financial need. Students who then decide that they want to pursue a career in public health may complete a Bachelor of Science Degree and a Master of Public Health after transferring to Kansas State University from their community college.

The USDA grant was written by Lisa Freeman, Beth Montelone, Deanna Ratzlaff, and Mary McElroy from Kansas State University. They invited KCKCC, JCCC, and DCCC to participate as partners. The driving force behind this initiative was the concern that there is a widening gap between Council of Colleges of Arts and Sciences recommendation in: "The Educated Citizen and Public Health: A Consensus Report on Public Health and Undergraduate Education" (2007). One initial concern was that it might be difficult to get enough students interested in order to offer it. The idea of offering the course via distance education was to ensure that there were enough students in the class for it to be allowed to be taught at the various institutions, and rotating the class between the schools, since all the institutions involved have a required minimum number of students for the class to be offered. (This turned out to not be a problem.)

The K-state group was composed of the following members: Lisa Freeman, Beth Montelone, Mary McElroy, Kimathi Choma and Deanna Ratzlaff. They met with each of the community college Co-Project Directors and interested faculty at their respective campuses to discuss the feasibility of the project. It was decided that each of the community colleges would have one or two faculty members contributing to the project. For KCKCC, Todd Gordon was chosen because he is a graduate from the College of Veterinary Medicine at K-State and therefore has a strong public health background. I became involved since I have a strong background in online course creation, development, delivery and evaluation. The contributors from JCCC, Luanne Wolfgram and Ellyn Mulcahy, were both Co-Directors with strong microbiology and epidemiological backgrounds, and Ellyn has extensive experience in online delivery of courses. Dodge City

had some limitations since they have a very small biology department, but Marcella Warner, who has extensive expertise in agriculture production and food chain management, was able to contribute to the project. Other contributors from the community and K-state were utilized for specialized course content that the main group could not provide.

The grant proposed that the course was to be offered online through each of the schools and delivered by one at a time, but there were three different learning platforms, K-State and Dodge City both have "home-grown" course delivery systems with JCCC and KCKCC both using ANGEL which helped a little. The idea of how to offer the class was nebulous at first, should several instructors, work together and the course be team taught, which works fine in an onground course, but there was a bit of concern that it would be too disconnected for an online course. The group decided that we would build one course with content from various contributors and that it would be woven into a unified course, with one voice as much as possible. In order to develop that continuity we set up the course in modules that followed a directed pattern so that each module included objectives, instructional content, PowerPoint lectures of similar size, and other activities to enhance learning.

The modules were designed to address basic principles of public health, topics of high interest at K-State such as food safety, biosecurity, infectious disease/zoonoses, nutrition, and physical activity followed by an introduction to the various careers in those areas. Several units required "field trips" in which the student would visit a facility e.g. water treatment plant, and report back on the experience. These activities enhanced the goal of familiarizing the students with the various areas in which public health careers exist. Several videos were made in which individuals in the field described what they do and how their career is part of the public health arena, so that the students could have "guest lecturers" in the online class. The course is truly a collaborative effort with direction weaving it into a quality course.

These types of intercollegial collaborative efforts are strongly encouraged in the higher education arena, yet, they are not always easy to achieve. The major obstacles are time, distance issues, and logistics. Dodge City, Kansas is several hours from K-State and KCKCC and JCCC are a couple hours away in the opposite direction, so meetings should be organized in such a way to be as few as possible and yet as productive as possible. It was hoped that we could do teleconference meetings, but after the first attempt which didn't run as smoothly as we had hoped, we decided that we would need to meet face-to-face for some of the meetings in Manhattan to really be effective in the creation and development of the course.

The Initiatives set out by the grant and the status of each are as follows:

- Develop an introductory survey public health course to be delivered via distance education that will be available to K-State and Kansas Community college students. This was done and it was offered at JCCC and KCKCC in the fall of 2009. (Initially the goal was to have one course offered, it did and was full, so a second course was offered and it filled as well. Johnson County and Kansas City Kansas Community Colleges had full classes in the Spring of 2010 and Kansas State and Dodge City will offer the class in the future.
- Develop a summer immersion experience course to expose students to the four public health emphasis areas associated with K-State's MPH program. The first pilot course was offered in the summer of 2009 and two KCKCC students were able to attend. The 2010 Summer Undergraduate Residency in Public Health is in the planning stages and students are currently being recruited to participate.
- Create the position of Director of Public Health Programs to coordinate program components and to mentor and advise students in PATHWAYS, this was completed and Dr. Kimathi Choma has made outreach visits to KCKCC (and the other community colleges).
- Establish connections with the existing programs at K-State and Kansas community colleges that serve students from groups currently underrepresented in food, agriculture, and public health. This was done and a group of students from KCKCC's Introduction to Public Health traveled to K-State for World Rabies Day in the Fall of 2009, and other students have met with Dr. Choma on KCKCC's campus to discuss career possibilities.
- Develop an accelerated Bachelors/MPH program, this is in the process of academic approval at K-State, and hope to have it put into place for the Fall 2010 semester.

Summary:

Projects like this benefit the university, the community colleges, the students, the workforce, and the community. It is well worth the effort of the faculty involved and this project could serve as a model for future collaborations. A survey class such as "Introduction to Public Health" is valuable because it offers information early in their education about career options that they may not have been aware of previously. The summer immersion program is powerful because it is a recruitment tool as well as a retention tool in that it brings the students to the campus and allows them to explore career possibilities as well as giving them connections at the new school so that when they transfer, they feel that they are part of a group and not alone in a new place. This innovative program is an excellent way to help students have a smooth transition from community college to the university. Students need guidance in career preparation and programs like this give them tools to make career choices in an informed manner, rather than just "choosing a major." Faculty can do more than just present class offerings, they can help students explore various careers and incorporate some of those presentations in current classes as well as developing other survey courses for career exploration. Administration can provide support and encouragement for these types of endeavors. In these times of economic stress, students deserve a full-course education which includes career exploration early in the process so that they can make good choices when planning for the future.

Resources:

Pathways to Public Health Grant application

Public Health Workforce: an Agenda for the 21st Century: a Report of the Public Health Functions Project. 1997. ISBN: 1428927719 <http://www.health.gov/phfunctions/publichlth.pdf>

Web sites associated with the project:

One Health Kansas <http://onehealthkansas.ksu.edu/>

Pathways to Public Health <http://onehealthkansas.k-state.edu/pathways/3/pathways-to-public-health>