

Podcast Interview Transcript

In each volume of *Progress in Community Health Partnerships: Research, Education, and Action*, the PCHP editors select one article for our Beyond the Manuscript podcast interview with the authors. Beyond the Manuscript provides authors with the opportunity to tell listeners what they would want to know about the project beyond what went into the final manuscript. Beyond the Manuscript podcasts are available for download on the journal's web site (www.press.jhu.edu/journals/pchp). This issue's Beyond the Manuscript podcast was conducted by Associate Editor Lee Bone and features Fran Close, the lead author of "Community-Based Internships to Address Environmental Issues: A Model for Effective Partnerships." The following is an edited transcript of the Beyond the Manuscript podcast.

Lee Bone: I'd like to start with the issue of community benefit and intern benefit of these internships.

Fran Close: There are various types of benefits that I think the community received as well as our interns did. The main thing is starting with the interns. Those graduate students are taking their didactic work to the community, meaning that they are able to learn how to design a survey, how to design effective communication. As far as health education literature with fact sheets and newsletters, they are able to take that and look at how that type of information can be used at a community level with real issues and concerns that a community would have when it comes to, in this case, environmental health issues.

As far as the community is concerned, the community doesn't have those types of skills. A lot of the community-based organizations that we were involved with, they were very organized and they did bring something to the table, so to speak. But our students were able to assist in those areas that they lacked or needed more assistance with, as far as survey design, fact sheets, and things like that.

Lee Bone: Where do you think the future, then, is in these community benefits and intern benefits? Can you see any changes that you might make to this whole program, now that you've just informed me that this is now part of your program in public health?

Fran Close: It is a requirement for our Masters of Public Health students to do an internship, they have various venues where they can do that at a community-based organization or at a health department, either locally or our state health departments. I think that this model and this type will be beneficial for, not just only the students, but for those types of environments that the students will utilize their skills in.

Lee Bone: Do your students actually continue on with these community-based organizations?

Fran Close:

Absolutely. We have documented evidence that we do have those students. Also part of our program, we have students who rotate in various concentrations of public health, and a lot of them, because the mission of our institute and of our university, we assist or are involved with those communities that are underserved. A lot of students come here and we tell them about that in course work and other things that we do, so a lot of them go out and not only do internships but remain there as permanent employees in some cases.

Lee Bone:

Given that these are very special interns that are part of your program, can you tell me more about how you recruit and select them?

Fran Close:

We produced flyers trying to attract, just do things as far as getting students just to catch their eye on a nice flyer. So we had the criteria, telling them about this particular program, we posted them in various colleges and schools here at the university. We also utilized our FAMU Info System, our e-mail system that we have here at the university. If a student, faculty member, staff person, or anyone who has a FAMU e-mail address receives this flyer that way. We did get some hits from students, or even faculty members, who wanted their students in their college or school to be involved in this, so we did that. That was our main way of communicating and, of course, we concentrated a lot of our efforts in our public health program as well as our Environmental Science Institute, especially because this was an environmental health program focus.

Lee Bone:

In terms of selection and matching students with the community-based organizations, what did you learn about that process?

Fran Close:

We learned that it was not easy. During the two-round interviews that we did with the students, they first spoke with us here at the institute, and we had a first round of interviews, just asking them basic questions about what they like as far as their interests in community health and things like that. And we also, as part of their application packet, looked at their transcript, so we were able to see kind of what they already know as far as their book knowledge. So that was our opportunity just to kind of have some dialog with the students.

If the student was selected to go to the second round, that's when we had our law firm there; their representatives were there giving a little bit more information about the community-based organization, just to see if we could get a fit based on those students' interest. I guess a main lesson learned there would be that it would be great if we could have rotated them, at those various community-based organizations, to really get a good, good fit. I think we did a pretty good job with the fit, but I think it would have been even better if we had students to go through just quickly, to see what they liked about it or they really, really would have, I think, delved into their projects even more if they had a gotten a lay of the land, so to speak.

- Lee Bone:* So then students didn't have opportunity to go and visit a community-based organization?
- Fran Close:* Yes. After they were selected, then they went out, but I was saying that I really wish that we could have gone before, and let them look at all the ones that were available, to talk to those executive directors and all of those at the beginning, before they committed to one particular CBO.
- Lee Bone:* Are there multiple faculty that are involved with this process?
- Fran Close:* Yes, our students were in the research methods courses, those faculty, who taught those courses, were involved in a consultant role as well, to make sure the students were engaging the community on the development of those surveys and also development of the fact sheets, as well as the newsletter. For example, we had one of our epidemiologists involved with one of the CBOs because they were interested in learning more about GIS.
- And so what we did was have that particular faculty member work really closely with a couple of students, so that they were able to get the skills that they need, even to train the trainer, so to speak. But he actually went down to that community and worked with them; but for the most part it was more like we trained the student and the student was able to assist the CBO with that particular skill.
- Lee Bone:* So faculty were available once the student got to the CBO, and found that they were having difficulty figuring out how to construct the survey or administer it?
- Fran Close:* Yes. And I think our faculty know that the cooperative agreement that we've had, we've had it, in general for 14 years at the college level, but only just the last few years here at the institute level, so it was really a great opportunity for our faculty to be involved with our students while they are basically in the field.
- Lee Bone:* Are there other lessons learned from all of this, that tell you that you need to change the model a little bit or provide different kind of supervision?
- Fran Close:* I think we did, and I'll give you an example. Recently, we were funded for a grant through, Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR). What we did with that particular grant, we actually used a similar model here with the community-based organization, and it's called the REEACH program. It's Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health. With that, we are using a similar model, as I stated. The difference is that there is going to be one main CBO along with other partners such as the Department of Health in Duval County, and so it's really more of a concentrated effort with more students in one place. I think instead of spreading ourselves between three or four community-based organizations, I think that we would probably be better off servicing one place.

Lee Bone:

So what is the name of the CBO?

Fran Close:

It's called, I want to say, Project New Ground, because it's really dealing with—and I may not have said that right, because this is all new to me too—but we are looking at the ash sites in Duval County, and with this there are a lot of communities, which are affected by these various ash sites. We are going to do some of the things like health education, awareness of what's going on in that particular community. So the department of health and some other partners are going to be involved, but we are going to concentrate on just one, and again, the reason that that's probably escaping me is because we haven't really decided on it.

Lee Bone:

With this amazing program, what plans are there for sustainability, and how will, for example, without grant support, what will happen?

Fran Close:

I guess the fact that we have a pretty good partnership is probably our key to sustaining the whole thing. With the organization, the CBOs we discussed in our manuscript, I think we'll just need to assess, from our vantage point, what their continued needs and issues are, for us to work effectively with them. Share their knowledge and collaborate, practice all the elements of sustainability. I think without funding we still can assist them with sustaining those activities and things that we started to implement, through our internship program that we have here. We were able to give students stipends and things like that during this internship program, but with this as being a requirement, we won't be able to give them a stipend. However, we will be able to put students in that same type of environment to assist the community.

Lee Bone:

Is there anything else that you would like to tell us about the model and what you have learned?

Fran Close:

We have learned that this type of partnership can work. Because of the myths that you hear oftentimes about academicians or an academic unit going into a general or community-based organization, how there's no buy in from the community or the stakeholders, or people who are involved in the community in those community issues, and also funding issues that may come up as far as making sure there is some equity there.

Also, as far as maintaining that rapport with that community, and making sure that what we came up with and what we found, that that goes back to the community, and I think this shows that that all can happen. You have a law firm, an academic unit, as well as community-based organizations working together with one common goal, and that is to make sure that communities are aware of what's going on in their environment, or what's going on in their community, and how they, themselves, as a community member can get on board and assist with all of the information, and even become leaders in making sure that those issues are addressed and addressed effectively.

Lee Bone:

Do you think at the institutional level, that there would ever be opportunities for community persons from the CBOs to come to FAMU and receive credit or take courses, in other words, have a community person who could either be as a student or as a co-faculty leader?

Fran Close:

Actually, that has happened on different levels. I've had community leaders come to my class, as guest lecturers, and give their real-life experience, and that was just better than anything that I could say for 16 weeks, because the students see people who are in the struggle, they're doing those things. So that's one way that I have utilized them, and even other faculty members have utilized our community leaders and community members. Also, we have, based on our rapport with various communities here, especially around the Florida A&M University area. We have been able to talk to some of those community members and leaders. They come and they apply to be a part of our program, and there are students right now who are working on their masters, who actually started at the grass roots level in a CBO.

Lee Bone:

That is a terrific example of the co-learning that needs to be in place for CBPR, I think, to be successful. You have covered a lot in this discussion and I really appreciate your taking the time to amplify what is already in the manuscript.