

**STUDENTS IN THE FIELD: Conducting the four assessments in MAPP through a public health practice, academic, and community-based collaborative**

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#### Research Objective

The objective of this research is to examine the inputs, processes, and outputs of conducting the four assessments within MAPP (Mobilizing for Action through Planning and Partnerships) through a community-based, public health practice, and academic collaborative approach to implementation. MAPP is a strategic planning process, comprised of a comprehensive set of health planning tools. A unique feature of MAPP is that it contains four distinct, but interlocking assessments. Information derived from each of these assessments is intended to inform the overall process of strategic planning and action leading to community health improvement.

#### Study Design

The basic study design utilized observational and descriptive methodologies within a community-based participatory framework during spring semesters 2004-2007. Descriptive data on inputs (personnel, time, student team development), processes (the assessment activities), and outputs/impacts (what happened as a result of the assessments) were tracked and compiled for each of the four MAPP assessments.

#### Population Studied

This study describes the involvement of students and faculty in an MPH (Master of Public Health) program, public health practitioners, and community participants from volunteer groups known as County Health Councils. Public health practitioners and academicians co-facilitate the graduate level, semester-long course, "Theories and Techniques in Health Planning," and partner with County Health Councils in this community-based collaborative. Students, participating in teams, are involved each year in planning, conducting, and presenting results on one of the four MAPP assessments, in concert with the usual activities of the County Health Councils.

#### Principal Findings

Preparatory time involving public health practice staff, faculty, and community participants included pre-course meetings, in-class lecture sessions, and County Health Council meetings. An average of 13 MPH students (range of 9-18) participated in each of the four assessments, with each student spending three blocks of time in the field.

Assessment activities (processes) included gathering primary quantitative and qualitative data, using a range of methodologies from surveys to key informant interviews to focus group discussions; gathering and analyzing secondary data; and providing oral and written presentations of findings at community forums.

## Conclusions

The results will show that time investments are manageable both for students and the community; lessons learned from each assessment can be effectively applied to other communities; and each group benefits from the collaborative. Communities were able to utilize assessment data to move forward with strategic planning, something they would not have otherwise been able to do without resources offered by students. Students gained real-life experience not typically offered in an academic program.

## Implications for Policy, Delivery, or Practice

Field-based components to courses in public health academic programs enrich teaching, research, and service opportunities, and should be considered more frequently when developing curricula. MAPP provides a dynamic framework for conducting community-based participatory practice and research through a collaborative approach. Public health practitioners, researchers, and community participants should develop procedural guidelines that make it conducive to take this collaborative approach for the ultimate goal of improving health at the community level.

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