Editorial: Integrative Learning in US Undergraduate Public Health Education: Effective High-Impact Practices

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Editorial on the Research Topic

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INTRODUCTION

Nearly 30 years ago, Ernest L. Boyer introduced a model of scholarship specifically focused on how we know something is scholarship (worthy of our attention as educators); how curriculum is a form of scholarship (at its best reflective of the specific discipline); and what is the quality of the scholarship or practice (how do we know quality practice when we see it) (1). The former Association of Schools of Public Health subsequently embraced application of the model to understanding scholarship in public health practice (2). This current volume does not derive directly from those origins, but nonetheless represents a well-timed exploration and example of where higher education has progressed in bringing the innovative, integrative conceptualization of higher education scholarship and practice laid out by Boyer, to realization through the growing arena of undergraduate public health programs.

The articles that follow recognize the importance of faculty to achieve curricular, pedagogical, and hence student learning goals. One of the authors of Scholarship Assessed (3) stated in 1997:

“The goal… was to … give scholarship a … more efficacious meaning … a new paradigm of scholarship, one with four separate yet interlocking parts: the discovery of knowledge, the integration of knowledge, the application of knowledge, and the scholarship of teaching. The first two kinds of scholarship—the discovery and integration of knowledge—reflect the investigative and synthesizing traditions of academic life. The third element, the application of knowledge, moves toward engagement as the scholar asks, “How can knowledge be responsibly applied to consequential problems?” Finally, the scholarship of teaching recognizes that the work of the scholar becomes consequential only as it is shared with others.”

At the same time, the authors included here were invited to specifically address a second arena of scholarly practice associated with additional elements of Boyer’s legacy, effective High-Impact Practices (HIPs)—practices that engage students, faculty, and often broader communities in integrative learning that connect academic and extra-academic learning environments. Research on HIPs has identified a series of criteria associated with pedagogical practices shown to be beneficial
for college students from many backgrounds, especially students
of color and non-traditional students who have different
strengths and weaknesses compared to traditional college
students (4–7). These high impact criteria include:

- Students must devote considerable time and effort to
  purposeful tasks that deepen student investment in the activity
  and connection to their academic program and college;
- Students find themselves in situations where they must
  interact with faculty, peers, and often community members
  about substantive matters over extended periods;
- Participating in one or more of these activities increases the
  likelihood students will experience diversity through contact
  with people, who are different from themselves;
- Students receive frequent feedback about their performance;
- Students see how what they are learning works in different
  settings on and off campus; and
- Participating in one or more of these practices in the context
  of a coherent, academically challenging curriculum deepens
  learning, brings one's values and beliefs into awareness, and
  develops the capacity to take the measure of events and actions
  and put them in perspective.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE COLLECTION

The purpose of this Research Topic was to examine the
role of effective HIPs within the curriculum of undergraduate
public health programs—through original research, reports, and
reviews—that promote integrative learning experiences. The
final collection of curated contributions is distributed between
two themes: (1) current application of high-impact educational
practices in undergraduate public health education; and (2) the
design and implementation of integrative undergraduate public
curriculum and programs.

High-Impact Educational Practices

Authentic and intentional assignments are fundamental to
HIPs and encourage “integrative learning,” both a simple
and complex approach to pedagogy. HIPs invariably target
written and oral communication skills, teamwork, ethical
decision-making, critical thinking, and the application of
knowledge—skills uniformly valued in recent employer surveys
[e.g., (8)]. Contributions that describe the development and
assessment of high-impact educational practices on the authors’
campuses include:

- collaborative learning (interprofessional education);
- diversity and global learning (study abroad);
- ePortfolios (capstone coursework);
- experiential learning (research, internship, service learning, or
  global learning);
- experiential learning (community-based learning);
- experiential learning (service learning-introductory coursework);
- experiential learning (service learning-capstone coursework);
  and
- learning communities (cohort model).

Integrated Public Health Curriculum and
Program Development

A second set of contributions that address aspects of the design
and implementation of authentic and intentional teaching and
learning practices for students who enroll in one of the nation’s
fastest-growing majors include:

- active learning and deliberative pedagogy;
- integrative curriculum reform; and
- student perceptions of integrative practices.

CONCLUSION

High-Impact Practices are not high impact simply because
they exhibit the criteria listed above. HIPs are highly effective
when they are intentionally embedded into a curriculum—both
formal and informal curricula—that brings students from an
introduction to a field of study through iterative practice of
knowledge and skills to demonstrated levels of quality warranting
a credential.

Undergraduate public health programs are perfectly
positioned to provide a framework for integrated learning
that encompasses not only the essential learning outcomes that
employers continue to demand—critical thinking, working
with diverse others, written and oral communications, ethics,
analysis, etc.—but a curriculum that is scaffolded and replete
with opportunities to practice and enhance performance and
application of knowledge and abilities to important personal,
social, and global challenges and needs.

This Research Topic is situated, in part, within a confluence
of initiatives and priorities that address demands for campuses
to provide meaningful evidence of student learning that guides
institutional decision-making to improve student performance.
Monitoring and responding to student performance levels are
not new activities for professional degree programs such as
public health. As undergraduate public health degree programs
continue to flourish at an unprecedented pace, however—for
example, “the number of undergraduate degrees awarded
will probably soon meet, and likely exceed, the number of
graduate degrees awarded” (9)—the need for authentic and
integrative student-centered practices at the undergraduate level
will similarly escalate.

We concur, and close, with Scobey’s (10) recent argument,

“…we want an educational future that draws on, and draws
out, the implications of the new HIPs. Such a model would
provide students with an arc of learning experiences—
active, collaborative, boundary-crossing, and integrative—that
interweave intellectual professional, civic, and personal growth.”

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

TR, along with KH, took the lead preparing the first draft.
AH edited the first draft and added additional content to the
manuscript. DP critically reviewed subsequent versions of the
Editorial. All authors contributed to the Editorial and approved
the final version for publication.
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REFERENCES


Conflict of Interest: The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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