

Abstract

Learning about health disparities first-hand in the US-Mexico border region: A field experience approach

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APHA's 2020 VIRTUAL Annual Meeting and Expo (Oct. 24 - 28)

A partnership between New Mexico State University and Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center developed a Health Disparities Field Experience (HDFE) to provide experiential learning about health disparities in the New Mexico border region and Navajo Country. Six graduate students from health-related degree programs and social work provided pre- and post-test information about knowledge, attitudes, and intended practices about the field experience. The six students spent one week doing online coursework, then traveled along the US-Mexico border and the Navajo Nation visiting rural health clinics and hospitals. We asked four questions (pre- and post) about attitudes toward the US health system, two knowledge questions about cancer health disparities, and a question about intent to enter a health disparities career and also asked open-ended questions about the impact of the experience. Responses indicated that three of the participants saw racism as a primary cause of cancer-related disparities, which was a change from their pre-test. When asked about the personal impact of the HDFE, respondents selected the experiential component; as one participant noted, "it's one thing to read about communities in journals and publications and to learn about them in a classroom setting. However, it's another to be able to interact with community members and better understand their experiences from their perspectives." Another added, "We met so many inspired and hardworking people." Additionally, there was an increase in understanding health disparities from a non-coursework perspective. Participants learned about health disparities from the HDFE and expressed high satisfaction with this approach to education.

Advocacy for health and health education Conduct evaluation related to programs, research, and other areas of practice Diversity and culture Provision of health care to the public Public health or related education

