

Conference Workshop Abstract

A region-wide field placement program built on the foundation of mentorship and professionalism

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Background: The Region IV Public Health Training Center (R-IV PHTC) provides public health students from the eight states of HHS Region IV with essential practice experiences that demonstrate the value of working with underserved populations. The Pathways to Practice Scholars field placement program is built on a foundation of mentorship, professionalism, and community.

Methods: Sixteen student scholars (13 graduate; 3 undergraduate) were selected to work during May-August 2015 in practice-oriented agencies serving underserved populations. Each scholar received a \$1500 living allowance. Seven of 16 accepted an internship outside the state of their university. In conjunction with mentors, Scholars developed work plans based on Council on Linkages Core Competency domains. Requirements included a pre-, mid- and post-assessment, an executive summary/reflection, and a virtual webinar presentation.

Results: Student Scholars worked at sites across eight states in state or local health departments, Area Health Education Centers (AHECs), and healthcare settings. Students identified Core Competency domains they developed most during the field placement: Communication, Analytical/Assessment, Leadership/Systems Thinking, and Community Engagement. The R-IV PHTC asked mentors to treat interns as valued employees and include them in activities beyond their specific project. Indicators of successful mentorship included expressed appreciation for student assistance and the desire to enrich the student experience while benefiting the agency mission. Mentors provided clearly defined projects for a short timeframe (10-12 weeks), adjusted to the students' capacity and readiness, and offered opportunities to apply classroom skills to practice. They helped students develop immediately useful products in collaboration with community stakeholders.

Conclusions: Mentors play a crucial role in the development and success of field placement students, but students and mentors share equal responsibility in fostering the relationship. Past case studies from this program demonstrate that some students find employment in these same agencies after graduation, and become mentors for future students, thus, creating a self-perpetuating learning community.

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