



**Spring 2008**  
**EPID 693, Special Topics—Addressing Health Disparities through**  
**Public Health Interventions**

**A service-learning course**

Credits: 3  
Classroom: Leigh House Conference Room  
Day/Time: Mondays 3:00-5:50 PM  
Note: to accommodate service-learning time outside the classroom, class meetings will likely be shortened

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**MPH PROGRAM MISSION STATEMENT**

The mission of the MPH Program at Virginia Commonwealth University is to promote health and well-being through commitment to public health education, excellence in research, and dedication to community service.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Semester course; 3 credit hours. Introduction to health disparities through a service-learning format. This course provides students with a review of survey methodologies useful in identifying issues of concern to community partners, discussing methods of sharing negative public health trends, and developing analytical skills through the integration of quantitative and qualitative data. The course will also provide the foundations for developing assessment and presentation skills. A combined format of classroom lecture and volunteer work in a community school will be used. Guest lecturers will be used frequently, and student discussion and reflection on the community work will be employed as part of the service-learning component of the course. Students will work with community school partners to identify instruction needs in health disparities populations by conducting focus groups and analyzing and presenting results. Students in this course will be required to attend a Community Learning Week event in conjunction with the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day/Week of service.

## **SERVICE-LEARNING**

Service-learning opportunities for VCU students place VCU on the front wave of a new concept in higher education. Through service-learning, students are provided with opportunities to serve in the larger community that surrounds our institution. In the process, positive linkages between the university and its community are enhanced. By doing service-learning in the community in content areas related to the course, students gain a better understanding of how health disparities impact populations and individuals.

### **What are the benefits of taking a service-learning course?**

Because this course is designated as a service-learning course, you are required to do service-learning activities and to meet all requirements associated with your service-learning efforts.

Service learning has a number of benefits to students:

1. Service-learning ties classroom instruction and community service together into a comprehensive whole, enriching the learning experience.
2. Service-learning provides the opportunity to learn from a community while contributing your own efforts to meet a shared goal. Service-learning helps students develop knowledge, skills, and values for active involvement in communities in the future, qualities desirable for public health professionals.
3. Service-learning looks good on a resume/CV, showing student involvement in a real-world setting, contributing to the needs of a community.
4. Through service-learning, you will:
  - a. Meet new people, find yourself in new situations, and perhaps even experience some unease as you are removed from your every day environment, all of which will provide a learning experience.
  - b. Learn about developing community collaborations and partnerships, knowledge valuable to public health professionals.
  - c. Make a difference in a community through your participation.

### **Requirements for service-learning in this course**

1. Students are required to work 20 hours in a designated community setting on a project with goals shared by both students and community partners.
2. Students must track their hours in a work log provided in course documents that is signed weekly by an approved site contact person.
3. Students must participate in a Community Learning Week Activity during the week of January 21<sup>st</sup>, 2007.
4. Students must keep a reflective journal in which they write about their experience each week.
5. Students must participate in classroom reflection sessions on the service-learning experience.

### **Guidelines for Community Learning Week Activity**

Community Learning Week is an annual event in Richmond that recognizes the achievements of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and others that were involved in the American civil rights movement of the 1960's. During Community Learning Week, a series of community-based events are held throughout the month of January, including the community mass meeting.

Students are required to attend at least one Community Learning Week activity submit a 2-3 page paper outlining how the principles of Community Learning Week can guide them in their service throughout the course. Students should be prepared to discuss their experiences and knowledge they gained during the following class period.

### **Guidelines for reflection in journals**

Reflection journals will be due in paper format each week after students receive service assignments. They should be double spaced, no more than one page, one-inch margins, in a font no smaller than 11 points. In creating your journal entries, please consider the following questions as you reflect:

1. What? Describe what you did in that period at the site, describing the most significant event(s) that occurred.
2. So What? Reflect on:
  - a. Your experience and reactions
  - b. How others (i.e., community partners, student colleagues) may have seen the experience from their own perspective
  - c. The positive and negative aspects of the experience (successes and disappointments)
3. Now What? Reflect on the following:
  - d. What insights have you gained from your experience (about yourself, people you have worked with, the setting for the service-learning), and how can you apply these insights to new situations?
  - e. How does this particular event or situation fit into the context of “the big picture”?
  - f. How can you apply your new understanding(s) to future action, goals, and personal change?

### **COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Describe the major health indicators for health disparities populations.
2. Identify and appropriate public health databases for evaluating issues that negatively impact populations in the Richmond Metropolitan region and interpret data from these sources.
3. Understand and implement selected qualitative data collection methodologies.
4. Compile and qualitative and qualitative data and summarize findings through written reports.
5. Recommend health topics that should be included in the curriculum for educational efforts of health disparities populations in selected Richmond City elementary schools.
6. Gain an understanding of the community and population served.

### **COURSE EMPHASIS:**

Social Justice: Social justice is the virtue which guides us in creating those organized human interactions we call institutions. In turn, social institutions, when justly organized, provide us with access to what is good for the person, both individually and in our associations with others. Social justice also imposes on each of us a personal responsibility to work with others to design

and continually perfect our institutions as tools for personal and social development.

<http://www.cesj.org/thirdway/economicjustice-defined.htm>

Distributive Justice: Is the idea that health care consumption should occur on the basis of need rather than the ability to pay (Flood, 2000). This implies that the ill should not be discriminated against simply because of the inability to pay for required health care services. In some cases, this has also come to mean that the wealthy should not benefit from their wealth in obtaining health services (Selic, 1995; Boucher and Palda, 1996).

## **APPLICABLE MPH PROGRAM COMPETENCIES**

The following competencies from the MPH Program apply to this course:

1. Interpret results of statistics analyses found in public health studies.
2. Describe a public health problem in terms of magnitude, person, time, and place.
3. Identify key sources of data for epidemiologic purposes.
4. Draw appropriate inferences from epidemiologic data.
5. Discuss the policy process for improving the health status of populations.
6. Describe the role of social and community factors in both the onset and solution of public health problems.
7. Identify the causes of social and behavioral factors that affect health of individuals and populations.
8. Apply ethical principles to public health program planning, implementation, and evaluation.
9. Identify individual, organizational, and community concerns, assets, resources and deficits for social and behavioral science interventions.
10. Demonstrate effective oral and written skills for communicating with different co-workers and/or audiences in the context of professional public health activities.
11. Engage in dialogue and learning from others to advance public health goals.
12. Demonstrate team-building, negotiation, and conflict management skills.
13. Demonstrate transparency, integrity, and honesty in all actions.
14. Use collaborative methods for achieving organizational and community health goals.
15. Inform, educate, and empower people about health issues through use of educational principles and knowledge of cultural difference and imperatives.
16. Mobilize community partnerships and action to identify and solve health problems through use of the principles on team development and organizational theory.

**REQUIRED READING:** Weekly readings will be posted on Blackboard.

## **EXPECTATIONS OF STUDENTS:**

- Continually review course syllabus throughout the semester.
- Complete all assignments on time as required.
- In-class participation is an essential part of the student's evaluation.
- Students will be responsible for facilitating class discussions.
- Complete service hours and at least one Community Learning Week activity.
- Outside readings and individual research are required.
- Always be prepared.
- Consult with the instructor for any assistance required.

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**ASSIGNMENTS:**

Each student is expected to complete and submit all required assignments as specified in the syllabus or as stipulated by the instructor. Any exception will require prior discussion with and permission of the instructor.

Service learning journals: 15%

To be submitted weekly, 250-300 words following reflection guidelines

Class assignments and participation: 15%

Includes participating in class discussions, critically evaluating material and facilitating class discussion at least once during the term

Community Learning Week: 5%

Students will attend at least one Community Learning Week activity be responsible for written and verbal discussion of experience and how it relates to service responsibilities throughout the course.

Completion service hours: 10%

Service hours must be recorded on the log sheet provided on Blackboard. Your site contact must sign your log after each visit to your service site. This will be due at the end of the term

Midterm exam: 20%

This will be a take home, essay format exam on a selected topic to allow you integrate experience at your service sites with learning with academic learning

Final presentation: 15%

Findings and recommendations for each school will be presented the last day of class.

Final exam: 20%

A comprehensive report with your findings about the health needs of the students at your site and recommendations for development of a health literacy curriculum will be due before 5pm on May 5<sup>th</sup>

Letter grades and associated points (4.0 – 0.0) are awarded in this course as follows and will appear on the student's official transcript.

A (100%-92%)	Represents achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements.
B (91%-83%)	Represents achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements.
C (82%-74%)	Represents achievement that meets all the course requirements.
D (73%-65%)	Represents achievement that does not meet all of the course requirements (or meets them all, but not fully), but is worthy of credit.
F (less than 65%)	Represents failure and signifies that a significant portion of the work was not completed (without prior arrangements for a grade of Incomplete (I), or was completed but at a level of achievement that was not worthy of credit.

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I (incomplete) Assigned at the discretion of the instructor when, due to circumstances beyond the student's control (e.g., unplanned hospitalization), a student is prevented from completing the work of the course on time. Requires a written agreement signed by both the instructor and the student. Work must be completed in time for the instructor to turn in a grade by the last day of the fall semester, after which time (by University policy) the "I" converts to an "F."

Students may withdraw from a course using the Web. Students also may withdraw in person at a student services center (Founders Hall or Sanger Hall). The last day to withdraw with a mark of "W" for spring 2008 is March 21. Withdrawal does not eliminate financial responsibility for the class(es). Students who withdraw from a course may or may not be entitled to a refund. Refer to Refund Policy on the [student accounting Web site](#) for details.

### CLASS SCHEDULE & ASSIGNMENTS

<b>Class # 1</b>	<b>January 14, 2008—Spring Class Begin</b>
<b>Topic:</b> Overview of course. Introduction to Service Learning and Health Disparities.	
<b>Speaker:</b> Sheryl Garland	<i>Journaling guidelines will be explained for CLW activity.</i>
Handouts	<i>Students provide availability for team placements and arranging service hours</i>

Monday

<b>No Class</b>	<b>January 21, 2008---University Closed</b>
Topic: Community Learning Week	NO CLASS: <i>Students required to participate in Community Learning Week activity</i>

<b>Class # 2</b>	<b>January 28, 2008</b>
<b>Topic:</b> Intro to Quantitative Data: Child Health Issues	Discuss CLW activity as and the value of service in the learning process.
<b>Speaker:</b> Michael Royster and Helen Aspaas	Due: CLW paper
Handouts	HW: Complete CITI online training

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<b>Class # 3</b>	<b>February 4, 2008</b>
<b>Topic:</b> Orientation to AmeriCorps and Richmond Public Schools and Human Subjects Research	<i>Shadow AmeriCorps workers and observe Americorps relationship with the schools</i>
<b>Speaker:</b> Monika Markowitz and Franklin Wallace	Due: proof of CITI completion
Handouts	HW: Quantitative data summary

<b>Class # 4</b>	<b>February 11, 2008</b>
<b>Topic:</b> Methods for Collecting and Analyzing Qualitative Data (pt 1)	<i>Meet key figures at the school and make contacts for later data collection</i>
<b>Speaker:</b> Robin Matsuyama	Due: Quantitative data summary
Handouts	HW: Survey rough draft

<b>Class # 5</b>	<b>February 18, 2008</b>
<b>Topic:</b> Methods for Collecting and Analyzing Qualitative Data (pt 2)	<i>Identify and speak with those who will complete the survey</i>
<b>Speaker:</b> Robin Matsuyama	Due: Survey rough draft
Handouts	HW: Survey final draft

<b>Class # 6</b>	<b>February 25, 2008</b>
<b>Topic:</b> Understanding Vulnerable Populations	<i>Talk with key contacts about survey design</i>
<b>Speaker:</b> Susan Gooden	Due: Survey final draft
Handouts	

<b>Class # 7</b>	<b>March 3, 2008</b>
<b>Topic:</b> Effective Interventions for Understanding Health Disparities	<i>Attend a school board, PTA, or staff meeting</i>
<b>Speakers:</b> Rose Singleton	
Handouts	Midterm exam will be given out. <b>Due March 17th</b>

<b>No Class</b>	<b>March 10, 2008—VCU Spring Break</b>
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<b>Class # 8</b>	<b>March 17, 2008</b>
<b>Topic:</b> The Importance of Cultural Competency	Provide outline/abstract for their presentation related to health curriculum for RPS
<b>Speakers:</b> Napoleon Peoples	<i>Begin survey administration</i>
Handouts	Surveys will be returned to students

<b>Class # 9</b>	<b>March 24, 2008</b>
<b>Topic:</b> Understanding issues related to Health Literacy in working with vulnerable populations	<i>Meet with school health teacher and get copy of what students are currently learning</i>
<b>Speaker:</b> May Kennedy	
Handouts	

<b>Class # 10</b>	<b>April 7, 2008</b>
<b>Topic:</b> Health Disparities: Why Should You Care?	<i>Collect all surveys</i>
<b>Speaker:</b> Wally Smith	
Handouts	

<b>Class # 11</b>	<b>April 14, 2008</b>
<b>Topic:</b> Community Based Participatory Research	<i>Meet with school principal/administrator discuss experience, schedule presentation of conclusions</i>
<b>Speakers:</b> Cornelia Ramsey	
Handouts	

<b>Class # 12</b>	<b>April 21, 2008</b>
<b>Topic: Presenting Qualitative Data</b>	Opportunity for students to prepare presentation
<b>Speaker:</b> Robin Matsuyama	<i>Present data at school meeting</i>

<b>Class # 13</b>	<b>April 28, 2008—Final Presentations</b>
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<b>Class # 14</b>	<b>May 5, 2008 - Final Exam due before 5pm</b>
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**APPLICABLE POLICIES**

### **Scholastic Dishonesty and Plagiarism**

Students are responsible for knowing the Virginia Commonwealth University policy on student conduct and scholastic dishonesty. All students are expected to conduct themselves in accordance with the VCU Honor Code, the full text of which can be found at:

<http://www.students.vcu.edu/rg/policies/honor.html>

In brief, appropriate conduct includes, but is not limited to:

- refraining from committing any act of cheating, plagiarizing, facilitating academic dishonesty, abusing academic materials, stealing, lying, or soliciting others to engage in any of the above;
- refraining from acts of intimidation, threats of physical harm, or threats of retribution in any attempt to prevent the testimony of another member of the University Community at any time after changes have been made; and
- reporting every instance in which there is suspicion or knowledge that academic conduct, which violates this policy or its spirit, has taken place to the faculty member responsible for instruction, or to a member of the MCV Honor Council.

In addition, original work is expected in this course. It is unacceptable to hand in assignments for this course for which you receive credit in another course unless by prior agreement with the instructor. Building on a line of work begun in another course or leading to a thesis, dissertation, or final project is acceptable. If you have any questions, consult the instructor.

### **Americans with Disabilities Act**

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 requires Virginia Commonwealth University to provide a "reasonable accommodation" to any individual who advises us of a physical or mental disability. If you have a physical or mental limitation that requires an accommodation or an academic adjustment, please go to the Americans with Disabilities web site:

<http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/adahom1.htm>

### **Sexual Harassment**

University policy strictly prohibits sexual harassment against any member of the University community. Acts of either verbal or physical sexual harassment will not be tolerated and will subject the person who commits such acts to disciplinary action under these guidelines and, possibly, other University policies and procedures. In addition, such acts could subject the violator to sanctions under federal and state laws and policies, including Title VII and IX of the federal civil rights laws. Specific sexual harassment policy information can be found at:

<http://www.students.vcu.edu/rg/policies/sexualharassment.htm>

### **Religious Holidays**

It is the policy of VCU to allow students, on an individual basis, the opportunity to observe their traditional religious holidays. Students desiring to observe religious holidays of special importance must provide advance written notification to each instructor by the end of the second week of classes.

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### **What to Know and Do To Be Prepared for Emergencies at VCU**

- Sign up to receive VCU text messaging alerts (<http://www.vcu.edu/alert/notify>). Keep your information up-to-date.
- Know the safe evacuation route from each of your classrooms. Emergency evacuation routes are posted in on-campus classrooms.
- Listen for and follow instructions from VCU or other designated authorities.
- Know where to go for additional emergency information (<http://www.vcu.edu/alert>).
- Know the emergency phone number for the VCU Police (828-1234). Report suspicious activities and objects.