

Health Communication and Social Marketing: A collaborative curriculum

Given the trend in the use of media among all age groups, it is increasingly important for practitioners to understand, utilize, and incorporate print, television, radio, Internet, and social media into public health initiatives used by both private and public agencies. Health communication encompasses the study and use of communication strategies to inform and influence individual and community decisions that enhance health. It links the domains of communication and health, and is increasingly recognized as a necessary element of efforts to improve personal and public health.¹ Social marketing is the application of commercial marketing principles and concepts to change health behaviors or policies, and has emerged as an effective way to promote health,² create healthy environments, and affect policies for the good of a population's health.

In 2009, the Delaware Health Sciences Alliance, a collaborative uniting Thomas Jefferson University and Hospitals, the University of Delaware, Christiana Care Health System and Nemours, was created. As part of that alliance, the University of Delaware (UD) and Thomas Jefferson University (TJU) entered into a joint initiative to teach a shared course on Health Communication and Social Marketing for graduate students in Health Promotion (UD) and Public Health (TJU). The in-person course was developed by Dr. Michael Peterson, and taught by Dr. Peterson (UD) and Dr. Rob Simmons (TJU) on five Saturdays at the

Wilmington campus of the University of Delaware. Evaluations of the course from the initial class of 10 were very positive regarding course content, sequence, and student learning activities. With student input, the course was revised for 2010 to provide an increased focus on social marketing principles and strategies. Dr. Peterson developed 10 online learning modules and assignments and the course was expanded to more fully cover topics in the areas of health literacy, mass media's impact on health, social marketing campaign development, implementation, and evaluation, use of new media in health promotion, ethics, market research techniques and strategies, message design approaches and tactics. The course delivery format was also modified to a hybrid, combining in-person and online sessions that encouraged students from both schools to participate. Students from TJU worked through the University of Delaware's SAKAI system (online class portal) that allowed them to download course lectures, presentations, readings, homework assignments, and links to valuable websites, as well as participate in online discussions, forums, and blogs.

A total of 17 students enrolled in the revised course held in spring 2010. The course was extremely well received by students who had the opportunity to learn, share, and experience health communications through a combination of lecture, hands-on projects, blogging, and discussions.

This collaborative effort between TJU and UD is the first course to be cross-listed and jointly taught by both universities and serves as an example of how the two institutions can work together sharing resources, faculty, and educational technology to provide students at both campuses with state-of-the-art public health and health promotion graduate education.

Health Communication and Social Marketing was chosen as the first course because of Dr. Peterson's expertise, and the desire for the TJU MPH program to add this knowledge and skill area to its curriculum due to the increasing need to tailor public health and health promotion communication to a variety of multi-cultural audiences. Health Communication and Social Marketing have also become important skill areas for business students, especially those with an interest in marketing. Currently there are four MBA students from UD enrolled in the course.

Both universities plan to continue to offer the course in future years and expect that with its value and track record additional health science students across both universities will enroll. ■

Michael Peterson, EdD

Professor, University of Delaware

Rob Simmons, DrPH, MPH, CHES, CPH

Associate Professor, Jefferson School of Population Health