

RESEARCH REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PROJECT TOPIC	Bridging the Gaps		
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REPORT INTRO

Panelists: Debbie Gallagher from Center of Three Rivers American Indian Center (COTRAIC), Joy Cannon from Center of Life, Sharon Connor of the School of Pharmacy, Paige Warren from the School of Nursing, Thai Nguyen from the School of Pharmacy, and William Louth-Marquez from the School of Medicine

BACKGROUND

Since 1996, Bridging the Gaps (BTG) -Pittsburgh provides graduate and upper level students of the health and social sciences the opportunity to work directly with underserved populations to better understand their health needs, while providing critical community outreach to organizations on the front lines of health and human services. BTG-Pittsburgh promotes respectful and reflective partnerships, where the benefits are reciprocal across community and university partners.

RESEARCH METHODS

Students from five disciplines work in interdisciplinary pairs for eight weeks, in community-based organizations, developing projects that result in tangible products for their host sites. Projects must incorporate the needs and priorities of the community site. Tangible final products have included health education curricula, resource guides and informational brochures, promotional films, PSAs and video series, playgrounds and other community spaces, and internal evaluations and needs assessments. Community partners report continuing use of BTG products from past years.

BTG-Pittsburgh provides training to future health professionals that aims to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to work effectively and respectfully across cultures and communities. In addition to learning from community-based mentors, interns participate in weekly didactic and reflective sessions at the university, discussing systemic challenges confronted by the populations with which they are working, strategic problem-solving, and learning from guest speakers about structural (and social) determinants of our local communities' health. At the program conclusion, students present their projects and products at an annual symposium to community partners, funders, and university faculty and staff. Organizations have the opportunity to share resources and products, as well as network with faculty and funders to share ideas.

CONCLUSIONS

At the Community Engaged Academic Forum, an interactive panel featuring BTG-Pittsburgh alumni, community partners, and faculty mentors speak to the challenges and rewards of participation in this unique and demanding partnership. Facilitators guide panelists in a Q and A format, including audience participation, to explore specific opportunities for increasing student preparedness and community capacity building. Panelists will weigh in on which aspects of university-community partnership offer unique learning opportunities, and which present frustrations. Challenges of engagement, including balancing competing priorities of partners, building and maintaining quality relationships and managing academic requirements will also be discussed.

By the end of the panel, participants should be able to describe two critical components of a community responsive internship program; understand the benefits of interdisciplinary, community-based work; and identify potential challenges when partnering university with community, as well as ways to work through challenges as partners