



Meeting Summary

Northern Plains Tribal Epidemiology Center
Aberdeen Area Tribal Chairmen's Health Board

Public Health Curricula at Northern Plains Tribal Colleges

United Tribes Technical College

Bismarck, North Dakota

September 19, 2006

Rationale

The purpose of this meeting was to bring together faculty and administrators of tribal colleges with tribal representatives and health program staff to discuss successful models of public health curricula in tribal colleges, the educational needs of tribal health programs, and training for students through public health research. In order to address the disparities in health outcomes that American Indians in the Northern Plains experience, the tribal colleges' role in training and educating students in public health practice is vital. Through this meeting we hoped to begin the dialogue between colleges inside and outside of the Northern Plains and tribes on creating and sustaining public health training opportunities for tribal college students so that they may go on to contribute to the reduction of these vast disparities in their own communities.

Thirty-seven people attended the meeting, including representatives from Sisseton-Wahpeton College, United Tribes Technical College, Sitting Bull College, Turtle Mountain Community College, Oglala Lakota College, Fort Berthold Community College, Cankdeska Cikana Community College, Diné College (Navajo Nation), the University of North Dakota, the University of Iowa, the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, the Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate and Aberdeen Area Tribal Chairmen's Health Board. Guests from the Mt. Sinai Medical School's Global Health Program also attended.

What is Public Health?

Public health is the science and practice of protecting and improving the health of a community through health education, control of communicable diseases, application of sanitary measures, and monitoring of environmental hazards. It is distinct from clinical medicine in that it focuses on the health of populations rather than individuals. Public health practice can take many forms including the assessment and monitoring of the health of populations to identify health problems and priorities; the formulation of public policies designed to solve identified local health problems; and the design of programs to prevent or control disease. Epidemiology is an aspect of public health practice that deals with the study of the causes, distribution, and control of disease in populations.

Meeting Topics and Presentations

Public Health Curricula and Program Development

Edward Garrison, PhD, MPH of Diné College in Shiprock, NM gave a presentation on the Associate of Science degree program in Public Health at Diné College, the tribal college of the Navajo Nation. He gave an overview of the history of the public health degree program, its roots in traditional Navajo culture and concepts, and the courses and tracks offered as part of the program. The program was developed around the Navajo concepts of thinking, action, implementation and evaluation. The Diné College program offers tracks in environmental health and health education and includes student-led research options. Dr. Garrison also discussed federal funding support from ATSDR and CDC that made it possible for Diné College to sustain the work that resulted in the development of the degree program.

Professors Dennis Renville and Jen Janecek-Hartman delivered a presentation on the development of the injury prevention degree program and the environmental science degree program at United Tribes Technical College. Mr. Renville discussed the history of the program which was developed to address the high mortality rates due to accidents among American Indians in the area, and the courses offered as part of the two-year degree program. He spoke about the work of the program's alumni, advocacy efforts undertaken by the department and the vision for a four year degree program.

Ms. Janecek-Hartman presented information on the Tribal Environmental Science program at UTTC. She discussed the history of the program and its development, the curriculum, the program's vision for the future and how the program responds to individual students' present and future goals. She also described research projects done by students in the department and the use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to further their training.

Dr. Joe Coulter (Citizen Potawatomi Nation), Professor and Associate Dean of Public Health at the University of Iowa spoke about the resources that the University of Iowa has available for tribal colleges. The University's College of Public Health offers a certificate program in public health and is eager to work with tribal colleges to set up distance learning for tribal college students so that they are able to participate in courses at the University of Iowa from their home college. Dr. Coulter also spoke about a low cost storage device, *eGranery*, that holds over 5 million documents which would allow tribal colleges with limited internet access or limited libraries to give students a way to search the internet for health-related topics.

The Role of Public Health in Nursing

Sarah Coulter Danner, Chair of the Nursing School at Oglala Lakota College (OLC) gave a presentation on the importance of nurses in public health. She discussed the public health role taken on by nurses professionally in promoting community health, preventing disease through education, home visits and clinics, and advocating for communities with health issues at the local state and national levels. There is a standard set of competencies for nurses in the public health role. She spoke about the need for associates-level nursing programs to develop these competencies at the basic

level given the lack of bachelors and masters-level staff to fill positions, particularly in our area. Ms. Coulter Danner also spoke about the need for tribal college nursing programs to support each other and how OLC integrates public health topics into the nursing school curriculum in the form of Service Learning and research papers.

Meeting the Needs of Tribal Health Programs

Professor Edward Garrison provided a presentation on the development of partnerships between Diné College and Navajo Nation tribal programs, especially the Navajo Nation CHR/Outreach Program. He described how the Community Health Representative (CHR) program has integrated public health coursework at the College into their scope of work, and described key elements of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the CHR/Outreach Program and Diné College. Dr. Garrison described how distance learning is used to enable the CHR/Outreach staff working in all areas of the Navajo Nation to more conveniently attend class sessions at various Diné College campus locations. He also discussed several other Diné College public health collaborations with the Navajo Nation such as the with Navajo Nation NARCH (Native American Research Center for Health) Program, Navajo Epidemiology Center, Tribal Institutional Review Board (Navajo Nation Human Research Review Board) and the Public Health Advisory Committee.

Training for Students through Public Health Research

Dr. Lyle Best presented on engaging tribal college students in research relevant to their communities, and specifically discussed his work on a genetic study of pre-eclampsia (PE) among American Indian women at Turtle Mountain Community College (TMCC). He described the study aims, the work that students contribute to it, and how the students interact with and provide a benefit to the community by participating in research. In addition to working on the PE study, TMCC students are also afforded the opportunity to attend conferences and visit labs and universities around the country to further their training. Three TMCC students – Melanie Nadeau, Jordan Vallie and Jacob Davis – talked about their experiences working with Dr. Best on the PE study. Dr. Best also talked about the TMCC annual research conference and its outcomes.

Dr. Mark Bauer presented information about student research at Diné College. He discussed its roots in Navajo culture, and the history of the college in conducting research with participation from the Navajo community. Many of the research opportunities are open not only to Diné College students, but to students of other colleges as well. Dr. Bauer offered several examples of projects undertaken by students including projects on environmental health issues, diabetes, nutrition, community needs assessments and projects utilizing GIS. He described the coursework preparation for field research and the types of opportunities available to students. Dr. Bauer also discussed the partnership between the Mayo Clinic and Diné College on cancer research.

Next Steps

The Aberdeen Area Tribal Chairmen's Health Board and the Northern Plains Tribal Epidemiology Center are committed to assisting Northern Plains tribal colleges in their further development of curricula and training opportunities for students in the field of public health.

We hope to engage the American Indian Higher Education Consortium in supporting public health curricula development at the national level and will continue to discuss the need for public health training in other national and regional forums. We look forward to hearing from more from Northern Plains tribal colleges on how we can support you in your efforts to increase public health training.