



Tools for Community-Based Research Summary Report

In summer 2015, Universities Without Walls, the distance education and training arm of the Ontario HIV Treatment Network (OHTN), partnered with the Faculty of Education at York University to pilot a certificate course in community-based research (CBR) methods.¹ This report, based on pre & post evaluations from the course, analytics from the Learning Management System (LMS), student testimonials, and the enduring requests for additional offerings, shows that the course was an overwhelming educational success.

Course Structure

Tools for Community-Based Research was an intensive, 5 week “blended learning”² course that ran from August 10th, 2015 to September 15th, 2015. A diverse group of 26 students enrolled in the course, including 5 PhD students, 3 MA students, 6 people who self-identified as living with HIV, and a variety of community leaders from the HIV/AIDS and other health sectors. We’re delighted to report that all 26 students successfully completed the mandatory assignments and received their certificates.

The curriculum was broken into 6 self-directed learning sessions, 2 synchronous online sessions and 2 in-person seminars. The curriculum included how to foster and sustain research partnerships, ethics, frequently used data collection methods and how to turn knowledge to action. The examples used were from health related CBR with an emphasis on HIV related research. During the self-directed sessions, students were asked to complete 10 different learning modules.³ Based on the analytics from our LMS, we know that, on average, each module was viewed 1.3 times per student. Collectively, the 26 students watched over 87 hours of self-directed learning modules during the course.

Measuring Learning

The learning objectives for this course were to help students (1) become aware of basic terms used in community-based research (CBR); (2) begin to apply CBR concepts to research contexts familiar to the learner; (3) increase the learner’s readiness level to participate in a community based research (CBR) study; (4) Apply new knowledge and concepts by sketching a CBR research proposal. To measure student learning we asked them to self-identify their levels of knowledge, skills, and experience pre and post training using a modified Kolb learning scale (ranging from “novice/advanced beginner” to “proficient/expert”).⁴

As a result of their participation in Tools for Community-Based Research, students experienced the greatest change in knowledge in the following areas:

- **How to plan a research project**
 - Pre= 48% novice/advanced beginner → Post= 0% novice/advanced beginner
 - Pre= 26% proficient/expert → Post = 47% proficient/expert
- **Interacting with a cross-section of persons living with HIV**
 - Pre= 22% novice/advanced beginner → Post= 0% novice/advanced beginner
 - Pre= 66% proficient/expert → Post = 68% proficient/expert

¹ Additional information about the course’s learning objectives and instructor bio can be found online at

<http://edu.yorku.ca/profdev/professional-programs/tools-for-community-based-research/>

² “Blended learning” integrates face-to-face and online learning. Online and classroom activities and course materials are selected to complement each other, to engage students and to achieve specified learning outcomes. <https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/resources/blended-learning>

³ The self-directed learning modules used in this course can be accessed at www.universitieswithoutwalls.ca/?page_id=996

⁴ Kolb, D. (1984). *Experiential Learning as the Science of Learning and Development*. NJ: Prentice Hall.

- **The basic terms and concepts of CBR in HIV research**
 - Pre= 22% novice/advanced beginner → Post= 10% novice/advanced beginner
 - Pre= 57% proficient/expert → Post = 68% proficient/expert
- **Tools and approaches to support research knowledge translation and dissemination**
 - Pre= 42% novice/advanced beginner → Post= 5% novice/advanced beginner
 - Pre= 20% proficient/expert → Post = 52% proficient/expert

In addition, here's how some of the students anonymously described their learning experience in our post-evaluation:

“My knowledge of research planning has changed and improved drastically. I understand the aspects involved and the steps needed to take. Thanks to my participation in this course I feel fully equipped to plan a research project.”

“Following the module about the importance of involving community members in a meaningful way, I sent an email right away to our community partner to discuss it. It was received very positively. Following the module on KTE, the same. I intuitively knew that it was the way to go, but this course gave me the tools to know how to proceed and the confidence that yes, it is the best way to go. That I should not feel shy to push for a more meaningful involvement of the community, even though I am a student.”

“I am not really a tech savvy person but this course was a great learning experience and showed how web conference technology can be used to teach and engage the community. Hopefully in the post learning CBR Community Learning there will be a workshop or orientation on web conference technology!”

“I had worked in an organization doing counselling for discordant couples. There was research also going on, but it did not involve people living with HIV. So within this course, I have heard the perspective of peer researchers, community members, researchers and coordinators living with HIV for the first time in my life. That was so great! They raised very important issues.”

Limitations

Some limitations to the replication of this course include expensive instructional design and editing software. Also this course would not have been as successful without the generous in-kind contributions by OHTN staff members and 6 scholarships awarded by the OHTN/UWW to less privileged students to offset tuition costs.

Lessons Learned

As instructors, we expected mostly beginner and advance beginner students would be interested in this course. But we soon realized that learners who are CBR practitioners, and advanced graduate students, are thirsty for recognized training opportunities and CBR teaching models to train others. Furthermore, 89% of students declared their interest in participating in another online course about HIV research, and 83% of students reported they would use the self-directed modules from this course to teach others about the basics of community-based research.

After the completing the course, at least three students reached out to the OHTN with concrete ideas for starting or moving their CBR projects forward. We intend to build on the success of this 5 week pilot course by adding to the self-directed curriculum and repackaging it as full credit, 13 week online undergraduate course.

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