Interactive strategies for teaching environmental justice in online MPH programs

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Background: Environmental justice is an important component of public health and environmental health courses. However, few texts include much information on environmental justice beyond the policy implications. In the University of West Florida's online Environmental Health course, we teach environmental justice in a novel way incorporating a local and more personal perspective. Methods: Students are engaged first with information about health issues surrounding one of the local superfund sites located in predominantly minority communities in Pensacola, Florida. As part of this assignment, students independently research environmental health issues and read the testimony of experts and community activists involved in these issues. To conclude the assignment, students write a series of interview questions for one of the local champions of environmental justice, Margaret Williams, credited with responsibility for EPA’s first large-scale relocation of an African American community. After the questions are submitted, students watch an interview with Mrs. Williams. The interview recorded several years ago, used original questions supplied by a former class and contains many of the same topics and questions students have submitted in subsequent semesters. Then, students follow-up with each other in a discussion forum regarding the answers and share their new perspectives on environmental justice. Implications for Environmental Health Practice: The process of contributing questions increases student engagement in this topic area. Additionally, by watching Margaret Williams' responses and hearing her motivations for involvement with environmental justice and concerns for community health issues, students are exposed to a richer perspective on these issues compared to text-based readings.

Learning Areas:
Planning of health education strategies, interventions, and programs
Public health or related education

Learning Objectives:
1) Identify innovative strategies for engaging graduate students in the study of environmental justice. 2) Demonstrate the utility of personal interviews in teaching environmental justice.

Keywords: Environmental Justice, Education

Presenting author's disclosure statement:

Qualified on the content I am responsible for because: I have taught this course for four years using this technique.

Any relevant financial relationships? No

I agree to comply with the American Public Health Association Conflict of Interest and Commercial Support Guidelines, and to disclose to the participants any off-label or experimental uses of a commercial product or service discussed in my presentation.