

Using Innovative Technology as a Tool to Recruit Minorities to Public Health Careers

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Objective: Develop a program designed to increase the number of minority undergraduate students who pursue a career in public health.

Minority populations, including African Americans, Hispanics, American Indians, and certain segments of the nation's Asian/Pacific Islander population, are not present in significant numbers in our public health workforce. While there are outstanding minorities in the public health career path, access to health professions remains unequal for minorities. To increase access to advanced study and career opportunities in public health for minorities, the Public Health Foundation (PHF) was awarded a cooperative agreement from the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). In **years one and two** of this cooperative agreement, PHF collaborated with one Historically Black College or University (HBCU) – Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU) – to pilot an outreach program. The collaboration has yielded the development and implementation of a program that specifically targets and is designed to: 1) increase the number of minority undergraduate students aware of public health as a field of study and the variance and diversity of career tracts in public health; 2) provide access to introductory public health training; and 3) provide public health internship opportunities to facilitate the target populations pursuit of public health careers. An increased number in minority undergraduate students with awareness about and access to training in public health can effectively contribute to ensuring that the public health workforce is more representative of all populations that comprise communities, especially minority communities with limited access to culturally competent public health programs.

From conducting research to completing online courses, the computer is a key tool for teaching and learning. TRAIN (<https://www.train.org>), the online platform/vehicle that was used in this initiative, is a unique web-based learning management solution for public health training and an effective mechanism for introducing minority undergraduate students to potential careers in public health. Currently with over 350,000 registered learners who participate in over 16,000 courses (online and on-site) provided by over 3,300 course providers, TRAIN offers introductory to advanced level trainings. Available 24/7, TRAIN is a convenient way for learners to search, register, and launch training at their convenience. The activities under this objective were designed to help undergraduate students access, use, and benefit from public health training.

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In **year one** of this initiative (June 1, 2008 through May 31, 2009), PHF collaborated with FAMU to develop the plan that was implemented in **year two** (June 1, 2009 through May 31, 2010). Activities included:

- Identified two public health introductory trainings on TRAIN in which FAMU students would participate:
 - **What is Public Health** – TRAIN Course ID# 1010190 – Course Provider: Midwest Center for Life-Long Learning in Public Health
 - **Orientation to Public Health** – TRAIN Course ID# 1000614 – Course Provider: New York-New Jersey Public Health Training Center
- Developed an evaluation to obtain feedback from learners regarding the training(s) they completed (Appendix A)

- Identified the target population at FAMU that would be invited to participate in this initiative

FAMU is composed of 13 colleges and universities and 2 institutes. The following population was targeted in this initiative:

- FAMU School of Nursing
- FAMU School of Allied Health Sciences
 - Health Information Management
 - Healthcare Management
 - Health Sciences
 - Cardio Pulmonary Science
 - Occupational Therapy
- FAMU School of Arts and Sciences
 - Biology and Chemistry
 - Social Work
 - Sociology
- FAMU School of Pharmacy
 - Eco-Social and Pharmacy Administration
- In collaboration with CDC and FAMU, indicators for this pilot project were identified:
 - the number of undergraduate students who register on TRAIN for the introductory public health training (at least **25** undergraduate students)
 - the number of undergraduate students who successfully complete the introductory public health training on TRAIN (at least **15** undergraduate students)
- Collaborated with FAMU to hire a MPH student intern at FAMU to work on this initiative

Job Description for Intern

The intern's responsibilities included:

- finalizing the decision on which introductory to public health trainings on TRAIN would be offered to the target population

- marketed TRAIN to target population (developed marketing documents, etc)
 - administration of introductory public health course(s) on TRAIN
 - identified incentives to motivate undergraduate students to participate in this initiative
 - customized certificate assigned to course
 - assisted in the process of securing internships to undergraduates (participating in this initiative) interested in pursuing a career in public health
 - assisted in determining how to track the progress of participants in this initiative
 - monitored this initiative
- Collaborated with FAMU to create incentives to motivate students to participate in this initiative. Each student completing the training and evaluation would be eligible to receive:
 - a certificate of participation
 - a flash drive
 - a list of internship opportunities in Leon County, FL and at PHF in Washington, DC
 - a tour of CDC
- Collaborated with FAMU to market this initiative to students as well as to faculty in various departments throughout FAMU. Marketing was conducted by:
 - email*
 - posters/flyers*
 - word of mouth
 - phone calls and meetings (with Department Chairs throughout the University)

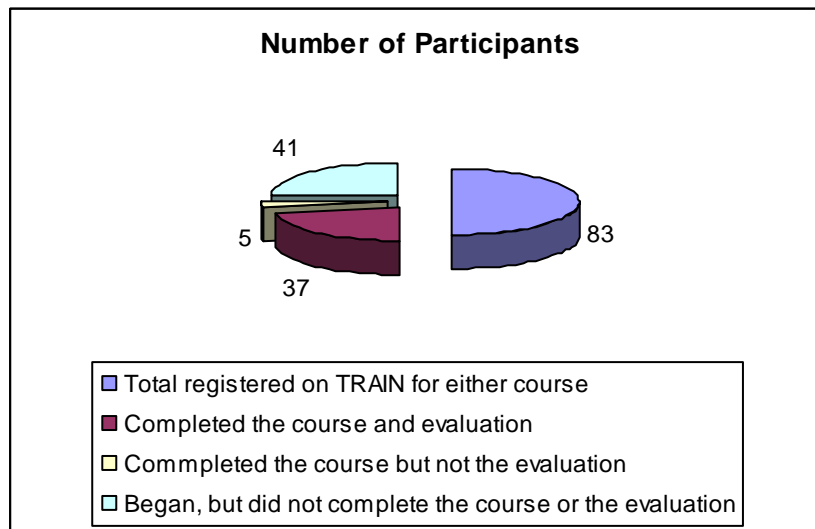
* Samples can be found in Appendix C.

- Launched the initiative in an open forum at FAMU on October 27, 2009 (Students were able to access trainings and evaluations from October 27, 2009 through February 5, 2010)
- Collaborated with FAMU, CDC, and the Leon County Health Departments to develop internships that would provide opportunity to at least 5 students who participated in and completed the trainings and evaluations on TRAIN.
- Collected and analyzed the data
- Held a closing program at FAMU – April 12, 2010, where students provided additional feedback about the initiative and they were awarded certificates of participation, a list of available internships, and a flash drive in appreciation of their participation and input into this initiative.

Analyzing the Data

Prior to the implementation of this initiative, it was determined by the CDC (Office of Workforce and Career Development/Career Paths to Public Health) that this pilot project would be successful if at least 25 students registered on TRAIN to take one of the two introductory public health trainings and if there were 15 students that registered and completed the trainings and evaluation. Within the first few weeks of launching this initiative, it was evident that we had exceeded this goal, as there were a total of 40 students who had signed up to take these courses on TRAIN. At this point, we expanded the parameters of this initiative to invite students who are currently in the MPH program at FAMU to participate in this initiative. By doing so, we anticipated comparing the responses from those who had recently begun working towards a graduate degree in public health to responses of undergraduate students who had received no formal public health training (Appendix B).

The response to this initiative exceeded the anticipated goals. The data shows that there were a total of 83 students who registered on TRAIN to participate in this initiative. Out of this number, 37 students completed the course and evaluation, and five students completed the course but not the evaluation (note: these five students are not included in the total number of students that completed the course, as they did not complete the evaluation). There were a total of 41 students that began, but did not complete the course or the evaluation.



What is Public Health

Course ID #101090

Course Provider: Midwest Center for Life-Long Learning in Public Health

Course Description:

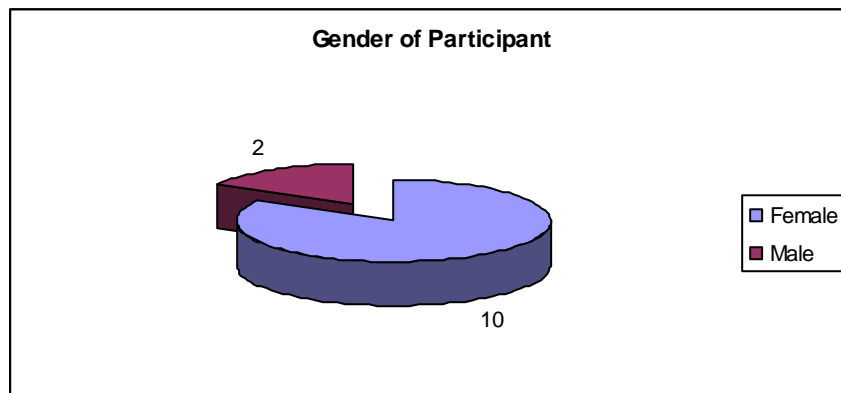
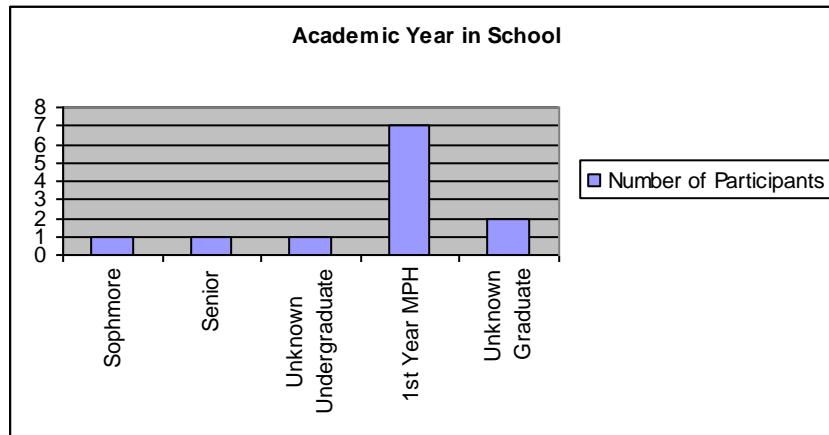
This course presents basic public health concepts including:

- *The principles of public health*
- *Essential Services of Public Health*
- *The importance of collaboration across governmental and private sector entities*
- *Achievements and future challenges of public health*
- *Cultural Competency*

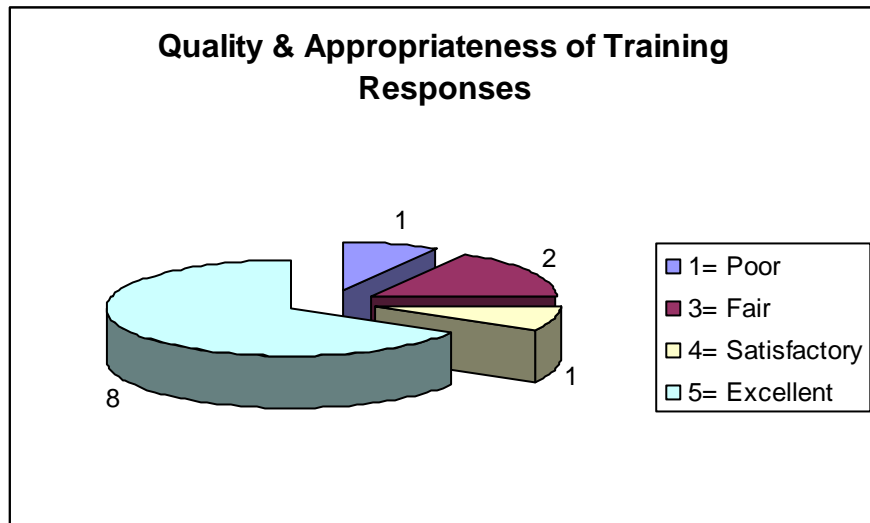
Application of these elements is stressed through two case studies:

- *Public health emergency response to an anhydrous ammonia spill.*
- *An American Indian community that is faced with increasing obesity and diabetes rates among school-age children*

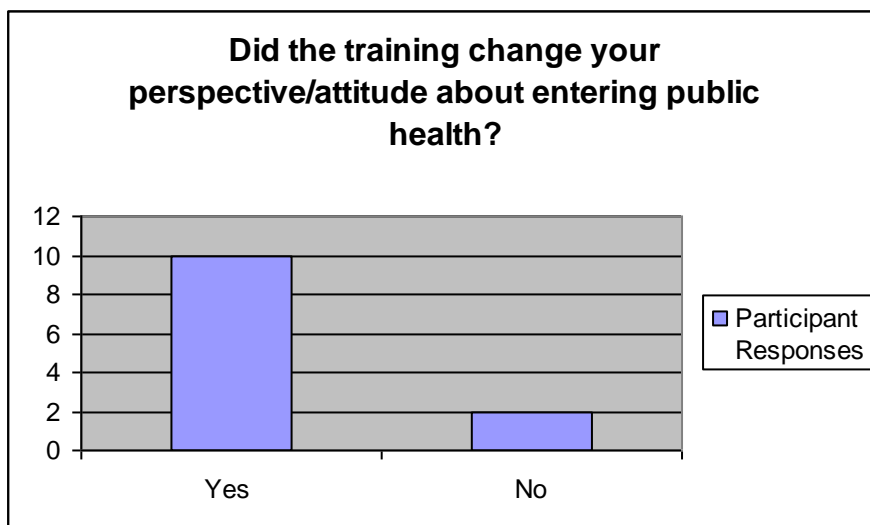
Out of the twelve students that completed both the training and evaluation, there were three undergraduate (2 females and 1 male) and nine graduate students (8 females and 1 male). Additional demographics can be found in Appendix B.



On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 = poor and 5 = excellent, eight participants rated the appropriateness and quality of this training as excellent.



When asked if the training changed their perspective/attitude about entering public health, 10 out of the 12 respondents answered in the affirmative. The two respondents that did not respond in the affirmative had already declared their majors (physical therapy and psychology, but thought that the training was enlightening).



Orientation to Public Health

Course ID# 1000614

Course Provider: New York-New Jersey Public Health Training Center

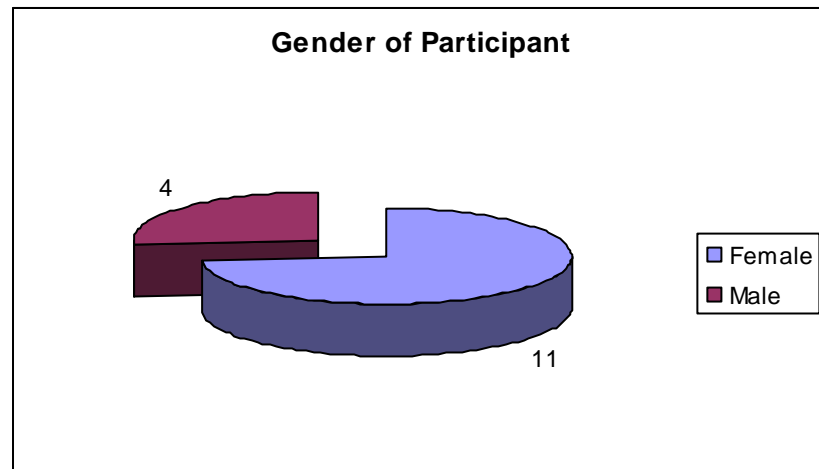
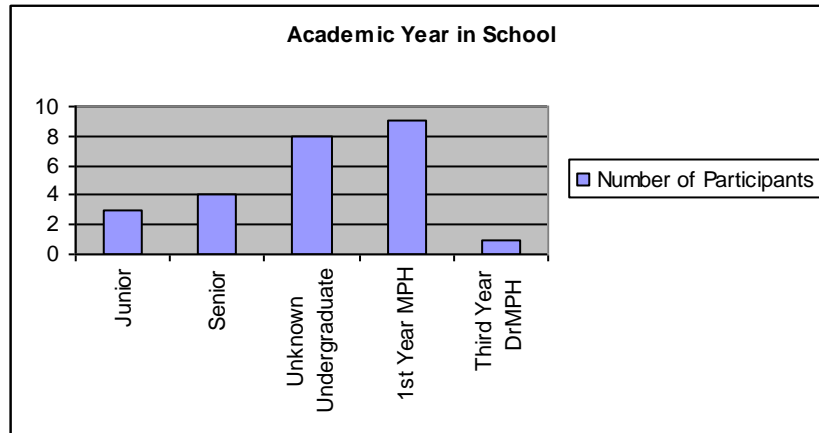
Course Description:

This web-based course is designed for support and technical staff in public health agencies. It would be helpful for anyone new to public health practice. The course can be incorporated into routine orientation programs. Course objectives: As a result of taking this course, participants will be able to:

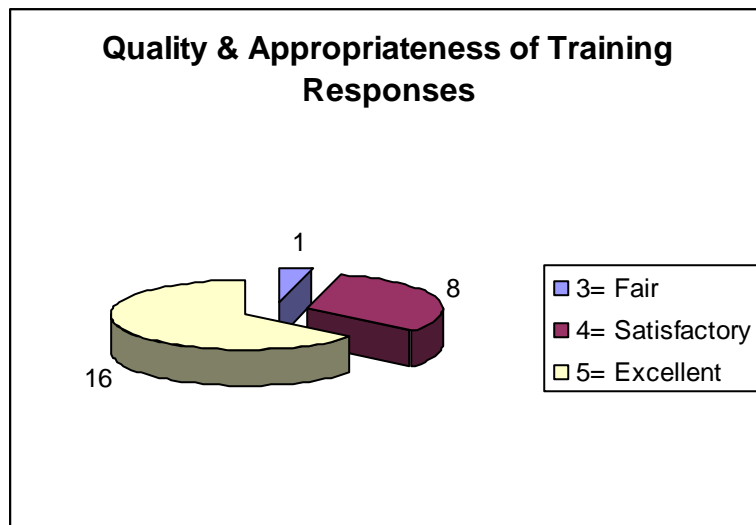
- *Define public health and its obligations.*
- *Explain how public health differs from health care.*
- *Give examples of how a local health agency carries out the essential services of public health.*

This interactive course incorporates simulated e-mail messaging, assignment of tasks, interviews, and tests.

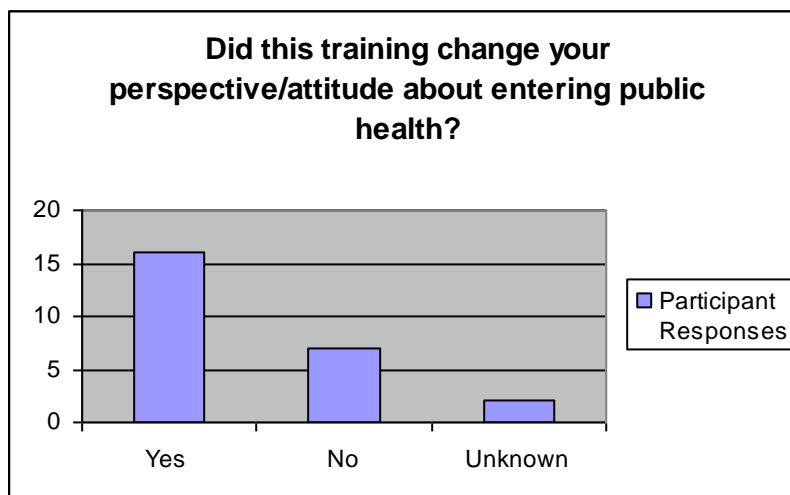
Out of the 25 students completing both the training and evaluation, there were fifteen undergraduate (11 females and 4 male) and ten graduate students (9 females and 1 male). Additional demographics can be found in Appendix B.



On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 = poor and 5 = excellent), sixteen participants rated the appropriateness and quality of this training as excellent.



When asked if the training changed their perspective/attitude about entering public health, 20 out of the 25 participants responded in the affirmative. Responses of the remaining 5 participants included that *no information could change their perspectives* and *the (increase in the) annual salary of a public health professional could potentially change their perspective*.



According to Dr. Cynthia M. Harris, Director and Professor, Florida A&M University Institute of Public Health, *"The Public Health Foundation TRAIN Program truly opened up an invaluable plethora of online public health courses to health science and non-science majors and augmented the program of current public health students by its rich diversity of choices. We are deeply appreciative in being chosen to participate in this important pilot effort."*

Each participant was also asked to document three things they learned from the training(s) as well as what (if any) relevancy these trainings have in relation to their career goals. Responses can be found in Appendix A, questions 2 and 4 respectively. As a result, it is recommended that the students participating in this pilot project be monitored/tracked over the next 2-5 years to see if they follow through and enroll in a public health degree program and/or pursue a public health career. In addition, to gain the full impact of this project, it is recommended that this initiative be replicated at other academic institutions with additional minority populations.

To develop better career access for minorities in the public health field, innovative measures to introduce public health prior to graduate education is important. It is evident from the limited data collected in this pilot project, that utilizing TRAIN as a mechanism to introduce students to the field of public health has proven to be one such measure that may potentially have an impact on increasing the number minorities who enter a public health career.