

Promising practice

University: University College Cork

Academic discipline: Cross disciplinary PhD students

Course title: Community Based Participatory Research Module

Course description:

The inter-disciplinary module on Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) is the first of its kind in University College Cork (UCC). Participating PhD students will be working in partnership with the Westgate Foundation (WF), in Ballincollig, an organisation that provides housing facilities and a range of services for older persons in the community. Westgate Foundation, in their own words, provides for the social and health needs of older persons. In adherence with the best practice principles of CBPR, the module will be partly delivered in UCC and partly on the grounds of the local community group, Westgate Foundation.

There are twelve PhD students enrolled in the module, from a wide range of disciplines and at varying stages of their research. Throughout the development of the module, the primary contact in Westgate Foundation, Aisling, has been involved and has contributed to the structure and design of the module. Constant dialogue with Aisling, in the preparatory and in the delivery stages of the module, assists in informing the module and ensuring that we are developing a rigorous and valuable CBPR module for all participating parties.

Students, along with the facilitators (Kenneth, Ruth and Catherine) will visit Westgate Foundation four times throughout the duration of the module. In the introductory class, significant emphasis is placed on good practice CBPR principles of working with community groups, such as WF. The PhD students on this module will be tasked with engaging the WF participants, and listening to them as they identify opportunities and challenges within their lives which they potentially wish to explore and research in further detail. Students will embark on a journey with the WF participants to facilitate and support them in developing a research question, and subsequently, a research proposal. Through this process it is envisaged that students will learn how to carry out a CBPR project in a meaningful and impactful way, and to understand how they and their community partners' respective skills and experiences can be exchanged for mutual benefit and growth, and for the prosperity of wider society.

The module will also seek to support and serve as a blueprint for the design of future CBPR studies, either undertaken by the service and residents/users themselves or in collaboration with CARL (Community Academic Research Links - an established UCC entity tasked with building links between the community and academia). Upon completion of the module, avenues and opportunities for maintaining the links with WF in the future will be discussed in detail, and students and participants will outline how they would like this project to develop. Support and guidance will be given to the CBPR participants and students to help direct the project into the appropriate channel to ensure that the project can continue beyond the scope of this module.

Learning outcomes:

Develop a deeper understanding of the principles of community-based participatory research and strategies for applying them.

Understand the key steps involved in developing and sustaining community-based participatory research partnerships with civil society organisations.

Understand, and apply in students' research/research design, principles of community-based participatory research.

Understand the relevance of research in society and the potential impact of research on individuals, groups, communities and society.

Identify common challenges faced by University/student(s) and civil society organisation partnerships, and strategies and resources for overcoming them.

Develop and enhance skills for all partners that will enhance their capacity for supporting and sustaining authentic community-based participatory research partnerships.

Understand and critique the role of the University in society and civic engagement in Higher Education Institutions.

How students' learning is assessed:

Students' learning was assessed through a reflective journal. Students had to record journal entries throughout the duration of the module and submit them upon completion of the module. The module was a postgraduate module, which in our university is assessed as pass/fail. Students passed if they met requirements for participating in the group project, mainly ensuring they attended all visits to our community partner and if they completed the journal entry to the required standard. Students learned about effective reflective journal writing throughout the module and were required to demonstrate strong reflective journal writing skills in their assignment.

How students learn with civil society organisations through this course:

Through the partnership with the Westgate Foundation students also had direct experience with power balance and equity. They had to grapple with their prior learning and experience and allow the process to evolve naturally without over directing or controlling developments. This enabled them to witness the development of an equitable partnership where the balance of power is shared, as much as possible.

This module expanded students' understanding and prior acceptance of what university research is and what university research could be. It gave them the experience to understand how CBPR can provide multiple, long-term benefits to multiple stakeholders.

How students learn about dimensions of RRI through this course:

There were key components on the module which addressed RRI keys and process requirements such as ethics, open access, diversity and inclusion, openness and transparency, governance and much more. In particular, ethics and its relationship with CBPR and PAR was talked about in one classroom session (3 hours).

In another classroom session (3 hours), the concept and dimensions of RRI were discussed in detail and students had to position their own PhD research within the framework or parameters of RRI – more time in a subsequent classroom session was dedicated to discussing students' research topics and its relationship with RRI.

Additionally, the UCC facilitators of the module invited a CSO to speak with the students. The CSO had previously participated on the PAR project with UCC CARL (UCC's Science Shop). The CSO visit exemplified why open access is important and how community organisations can benefit from it. Students saw first-hand how diversity and inclusion between multiple stakeholders can enhance a particular discipline or subject area and add a valuable perspective.

RRI keys integrated in the course:

Public engagement/ societal engagement; Open access; Ethics; Governance; Social Justice

RRI process requirements integrated in the course:

Diversity and Inclusion; Anticipation and Reflection; Openness and Transparency; Responsiveness and adaptive change

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