

Case Study

Crystallizing engaged and participatory research for PhD students and community participants: delving into the world of Community-based Participatory Research

Activity

University College Cork (UCC), Ireland, launched a Community-based Participatory Research (CBPR) module (5 credits) for PhD students. Each year a new cohort of students, from a range of disciplines, and community researchers explore a societal challenge experienced by the community. Student researchers meet with the partner in the community setting up to 5 times for 3 hour sessions and also participate in classroom based discussions. Through engaging with community partners on real-world research issues, students are made aware of the role of research beyond the university and gain an increased sense of civic responsibility. For the community partner, dedicated time with student researchers provides a supportive environment to explore key topics, helping to build capacity and to exchange expertise across individuals.



Conclusions

Through participating in this CBPR module, students gain first-hand practical experience of working with groups outside the universities and supporting them to identify and explore complex, multi-faceted societal challenges. Community participants begin to see themselves as valuable community researchers with unique, situational knowledge and expertise. This has a direct impact on organizational factors such as management, engagement with services, future planning etc.

The module directly links with UCC Community-academic Research Links (UCC's Science Shop). For example, promising research questions generated through CBPR collaborations can become Science Shop projects.



Methodology

Community-based participatory research focuses on the reciprocity and democratization of knowledge production between stakeholders. While on campus (with students only), a flipped classroom approach is used by the instructors and students explore participatory research methodologies and topics such as the ethics of CBPR. As part of the assessment process, students are required to actively participate in discussions and to keep a reflective journal throughout the collaboration. In the community sessions, tools such as community mapping and appreciative enquiry are introduced to stimulate and scaffold collaborative discussions. From here, key themes of importance emerge and participants identify how best to explore those themes.



Learning outcomes

- Recognise the principles of community-based participatory research and identify strategies for applying these.
- Outline the key steps involved in developing and sustaining community-based participatory research partnerships with civil society organisations.
- Synthesize the principles of community-based participatory research and apply in students' research/research design, principles of community-based participatory research.
- Discuss 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 recommend strategies and resources for overcoming them.
- List participatory methods for including the voices of multiple stakeholders in decision-making processes. Critique the role of the University in society and civic engagement in HEIs.

Trainers' and Learners' profiles

The CBPR module is taught by EnRRICH and UCC staff members Catherine O'Mahony, Kenneth Burns, Ruth Hally and Martin Galvin. Students enroll from disciplines as diverse as food business, psychology, pharmacy, engineering, and climate change. Many students on the module have no or little experience of participatory research and are often in the early phase of their PhD research.

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