Successes, Challenges, and Future Directions
HHS 376:
Race, Class, and Health Equity: Examining Systems, Power, and Institutions in Society
(Spring 2021)

To successfully launch HHS 376, the Strengthening Health Equity P2 team and TRECC (The Racial Equity Course Committee) held virtual meetings as a team, met with and sought feedback from members of the Greensboro Health Disparities Collaborative, and coordinated and communicated with UNCG administration to deal with logistics of getting a new course approved and added to the Fall schedule.

What went well during the planning phase?

During the planning phase for this course, the persistence of the planning team, especially Crystal Dixon and Christina Yongue, allowed us to keep doing despite multiple delays and barriers. Due to limited course load availability of Crystal Dixon, Christina Yongue served as the main co-lead who finalized the syllabus, designed the class schedule, created the canvas modules and curriculum sequencing, selected required readings and videos, co-designed the main scaffolded assignment, created the assignment grading rubrics, coordinated planning meetings among co-instructors and the graduate assistant, and teaching. Lecture, grading support, and coordination of students registering and attending the Racial Equity Training was provided from Crystal Dixon and Kari Thatcher (community instructor).

Kari Thatcher spent considerable time helping to co-design the main assignment and gave constructive feedback those assignments (Bibliographies and Power Analysis) to direct student learning about racial-equity, its historical causes, and systemic manifestations locally.

Also, in the planning phase, Crystal Dixon's initial and persistent organizing work to consult with other faculty, at other universities and within UNCG, to gain insight about building this course was critical to its success.

It also helped that we gained the ideas from the focus group held with volunteers from the Greensboro Health Disparities Collaborative to plan for this course. Their input redirected the main assignment focus (e.g., they recommended that we make sure the students came away with a deeper analysis / understanding of the underlying problems of racial health equity when examining systems and institutions).

The Planning Phase

What were some of the challenges faced during the planning phase?

We faced challenges around the difficulty of finding out who to talk to in administration at UNCG to get the information needed to add a course on the schedule, to allow it to count as an elective for different disciplines, and to find out about, keep track of, and meet deadlines for paperwork that needed to be submitted to launch the course.. Also, due to the uncertainty of knowing if the course would be offered, valuable advertisement time was lost during the advising / registration window in the semester prior to the start of the course. Additionally, it was difficult to recruit

students into the course due to limited time and capacity (the normal assigned workload) of the faculty on the planning team. It was also challenging to schedule students into a Phase 1 Racial Equity Institute, LLC training at an appropriate time with relation to the start of the semester. The questions we had to navigate were:

- Can we require the students to attend before the semester starts?
  - If not, how do we get them into a session early enough in the semester for it to serve as the foundation of the course?
- How do we manage reserving seats in a Phase 1 workshop when we were unsure if we'll have enough students to hold the course? (We would not know until very close to the workshop dates due to workshops filling up months ahead of time)
- Once we launched the course, we had to address students who did not attend the entire Phase 1 Racial Equity Training or did not stay the whole time as required for the course. The question was, "How do we evaluate a student's performance in the course, when they miss attending all or most of the required training (which served as the 'required textbook' of the course.)?
- Course documents (e.g., syllabus, assignments, projects, etc.) were not officially created until it was nearing the beginning of the Spring semester or during the semester which created a tight window to navigate at times. The question was, "Since the planning team has limited time to plan this course, when can we best find common times to meet among co-instructors without taking a substantial amount of time away from other responsibilities? Also, how do we estimate the appropriate amount of time needed by co-instructors to make the class successful?"

- Further, we were challenged about how to pay for student registrations and a community co-instructor in a sustainable way. The question was, "With a dwindling budget, how do we use our funding in the most advantageous way (for sustainability after the course has concluded, and to build a model for the high value of community expertise and involvement)?"

What recommendations does the team offer to improve course planning?

We recommend that the course be offered the same semester every year. If the course is offered in the Spring semester, work with The Partnership Project (TPP) in September/October to identify the best week in the subsequent spring semester (January/February) for students to attend a racial equity workshop, so that TPP can have that information when requesting workshop dates from REI. Prior to recruiting students into the class, students should be interviewed to ensure the course is a good fit, if feasible. We should recruit the students into the class and have them register for the Spring Phase 1 in October/November, before the UNCG class registration becomes available, so we know the students are committed to attending the Phase 1. By having students pre-registered for the workshop, this will eliminate concern for meeting the minimum enrollment requirement for the course If the course is held in the Fall, the schedule coordination with TPP would need to take place a year in advance of the class and workshop since TPP requests workshop dates for the next calendar year in Nov/Dec. Therefore, for a Fall 2022 course, we would need to begin planning in November 2021 what workshop dates to request TPP.

Regarding how to plan for co-leading the course, we recommend that the course, have both (1) a faculty member who has attended a Racial Equity Training, Phase 1, within the last 5 years, and implemented the principles within an institution with demonstrated results and (2) a representative from the TPP or Racial Equity Institute to be a co-instructor and/or co-planner of the course to help manage logistics of the required training attendance of students. It is also recommended, for effective teaching and modeling, that these two people represent the Person of Color racial category, and the white racial category.

The Implementation Phase

What activities were completed to successfully implement the course?

We had bi-monthly teaching team meetings and check-ins via email and other forms of communication.

What went well during the course?

We were able to get most of the students into a Phase 1 training early in the semester and split the responsibility for lecturing. It was very helpful to have a TA for the course to assist with grading and student communication. Co-listed faculty and community co-instructor were able to cover at least one lecture during the semester. In addition, at least one community partner (representing the Racial Equity Trainers in the student's Phase 1 workshop) served as a returning guest speaker on their topic of expertise. Student engagement was high during class discussions and allowed opportunity for processing, reflecting, and growth on various topics. It also created a space for safe disclosures, sharing of experiences, and revelatory moments of their personal experiences.

What were some challenges faced during the course?

Some of the students did not participate in the Phase I workshop. This was a challenge since the course is based on the 2-day training. It was emphasized to students, prior to enrolling, the requirement of attending both days of the training to maximize their performance in the course. As a result, we had to determine how to proceed with the group project assignments and how to reallocate assignment percentages for course credit.

Further, one student who enrolled in the course created a challenging educational space for some students who expressed their personal experiences with racial microaggressions and being disrespected. Rather than accepting the class rules of being open minded and respectful of others' experiences, this student challenges their experiences which created a hostile environment for that specific group outside of class during their "group-work" meetings. This required two consecutive, faculty-facilitated meetings to address which required additional faculty resources and time. This emphasized the importance for screening students before enrolling into the course and having experienced co-instructors to manage issues of racial misunderstandings in an educational space.

In mid-February we realized it would be a good idea to get the community co-instructor access to Canvas, and it posed a few administrative challenges to successfully add them into Canvas. Since IT was unable to successfully add her to the course, this prevented the community co-

instructor from being able to grade in Canvas, accessing/viewing the reading assignments, and collaborating with the teaching team in Canvas

What are some recommendations to improve this course?

We recommend:

(1) Screening students through an application process before enrolling into the course
(2) Fleshing out and revamping the modules in advance of the semester,
(3) Successfully adding the community co-instructor onto Canvas before the semester begins,
(4) Having the students pay at least a small amount for the Phase I REI training to increase accountability and investment in their own learning and attendance
(5) Changing assignment due dates (e.g., having the students turn in their first bibliography earlier) to allow for more time for them to integrate instructor feedback (This will be based on when students are able to attend the Phase 1 REI Training. *See prior recommendations on how to coordinate with TPP to schedule this.*)
(6) Spending more time explaining to the students what the power analysis project is and how to approach it.