



## Developing Undergraduate Community Psychology Pedagogy and Research Practice

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The goal of this special issue is to center the practice of community psychology (CP) teaching and research within primarily undergraduate institutions. While there is discussion broadly about the importance of increasing the visibility of CP in undergraduate education to support graduate programs in the field, less attention has been given to the pedagogical and research-related practices of people working primarily with undergraduates. Although undergraduate CP students may not all go on to graduate school, they do apply CP principles to a variety of settings and organizations post-graduation. Therefore, community psychologists working within undergraduate settings have a wider reach to bring interested individuals into the field and to bring the field to communities than perhaps anyone else in CP education or practice. It is imperative that we develop a CP pedagogy (including goals, approaches, and activities) through reflection and evaluation. Moreover, understanding the successes, challenges, and needs of community psychologists in these roles is long overdue.

Many community psychologists are doing creative, meaningful work within undergraduate-focused settings. Often they are doing this work in relative isolation, as few undergraduate-focused programs employ multiple community psychologists. At present, the broader field rarely invites undergraduate-focused work or voice into our scholarly spaces. Moreover, undergraduate educators may have limited

support for research and publication from their home institutions. Put another way (and putting ourselves into the conversation), the field of community psychology as a whole rarely facilitates access and inclusion for those of us working at primarily undergraduate institutions. Therefore, little has been recorded about the opportunities and challenges faced by community psychologists working within these settings. Similarly, there is limited scholarship of community psychology pedagogy. This reflects a missed opportunity for community psychologists to support and learn from one another while building a theoretical and applied body of scholarship on social justice teaching and learning in CP.

This special issue emerged as a compliment to ongoing efforts to open new space for dialogue, professional development, and intentional scholarly attention on undergraduate CP pedagogy and research practice. In the last five years, community psychologists at primarily undergraduate-serving institutions and those dedicated to undergraduate education within graduate programs have expanded the conversation about undergraduate education in CP. At conference sessions and in publications, we named and discussed the unique challenges of doing CP research in our contexts and the too often unspoken or ignored complexity of teaching CP in ethical, socially just ways (Lichty & Palamaro-Munsell, 2017). The CP Practice in Undergraduate Settings Interest

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Group was founded in 2017, and provides an adaptive space for collaboration, developing skills, and sharing professional practice (Lichty, Wallin-Ruschman, & Palamaro-Munsell, 2018). As a collective we recognize the need for more structured and supported opportunities to communicate, evaluate, and grow undergraduate CP pedagogy and practice. This special issue starts to address that need. The six articles included in the first volume of this double special issue on undergraduate CP teaching and learning reflect unique voices and experiences in undergraduate CP practice. The educator and student authors are engaged in innovative, intentional, and rigorous teaching and learning CP practice. We are inspired by their creativity and commitment to undergraduate students.

## Observations from this Collection

The field of community psychology, as an applied, participatory, empirical approach to power-conscious social change has much to offer undergraduate education and undergraduate institutions. As illustrated in this two volume collection of submissions, CP instructors create space for students to challenge existing ideologies, analyze social issues through multi-level frameworks, build skills for engaging in community change, and participate in collaborative, applied research and learning practices.

The papers included in this special issue speak to the transformative potential of the undergraduate community psychology classroom and research team. Janelle Silva bridges her personal identity and journey as an educator with the concept of transcommunality to explore class assignments and activities that serve as a catalyst for praxis of CP values. Benjamin Graham presents the design process and implementation strategies of a geographically and historically-grounded Community-based

Service Learning Project. Utilizing case analysis, Dawn Henderson, Pamela Martin, and Katina Harris identify unique opportunities and challenges associated with course construction and implementation at a Historically Black College and University (HBCU). Lauren Cattaneo, Rachel Shor, Jenna Calton, Kris Gebhard, Syeda Buchwach, Nour Elshabassi, and Stephanie Hargrove present in-depth course design alongside quasi-experimental findings assessing the impact of a social justice service learning course nested in a traditional psychology program. Elizabeth Thomas, Marsha Walton, Anna Manoogian, Anna Baker-Olson, Bianca Branch, Adele Malpert, Karina Henderson, and Remi Parker describe their campus-based participatory research model and examine the potential for undergraduate research experience as meaningful site of learning and community of practice for students, institutions, and the field. Mariah Kornbluh, Danielle Kohfeldt, Lindsay Banks, and Holly Bott completed the Teaching Community Psychology Survey, which provides insights into the conditions, practices, successes, and challenges of undergraduate CP teachers. They combine dynamic data displays with qualitative data and invite us to ask our own questions about what comes next in our efforts to learn about and support CP undergraduate educators.

The methods for inquiring about teaching and learning practice are varied: sources of evidence include auto-ethnographic field notes and systematic reflection, multi-perspective reflection on course components, analysis of course evaluations and student products (e.g., reflective essays, field notes, and final project presentations), and quantitative surveys assessing change over time. Many authors included example syllabi and/or course activities as a way to share teaching approaches and strategies with colleagues. Of particular note in this collection is the collaboration between faculty

and students. Half of the work in this issue include undergraduate and graduate student co-authors. This intentional valuing of the voice and expertise of students as participants in pedagogy development is significant.

Alongside the excitement of the transformative potential of these collective works, readers will detect the significant responsibility we have to support those engaged in undergraduate CP education or risk harm to both students and faculty. In considering the experience and contribution of these undergraduate-focused practitioners (including recent/current undergraduate student co-authors), we surface key questions and considerations for our field.

### **CP Pedagogy-Environment Fit**

As in all community psychology practice, context matters in undergraduate education. Attention to institutional and programmatic culture and resource allocation is critical to the success of undergraduate CP education and research. We think of this as the CP pedagogy-environment fit. Many CP educators are teaching in contexts that may be resistant, if not hostile, to CP values and methods. Departments and institutions may not be familiar with CP, despite having hired a community psychologist. Where CP values and commitments are not aligned with the institutional or departmental context (i.e., infrastructure and practices), instructors face heavier lifts to execute applied, reflective learning opportunities and especially community-engaged social justice projects. Regional characteristics such as the political context, geographic spread of the student population, and surrounding economic realities can influence challenges and opportunities for CP practitioners to create engaged learning projects. Where we are successful in those settings, we unleash students to manage a social ecology that may

not welcome them. These potential instructional challenges and real-world outcomes warrant thoughtful attention and support from the field.

### **Nested Student-Faculty Dynamics: Readiness and Capacity**

Institutional, regional, and student characteristics all dynamically interact with CP practitioner characteristics in the execution of any given CP classroom. When we recognize the CP classroom as a site of CP practice, we should not be surprised to note the importance of (student) readiness and (instructor) capacity. Student characteristics significantly impact undergraduate education practices. This includes readiness to engage in everything from social justice dialogue to personal reflection to research practice. Readiness to engage in the undergraduate CP classroom is influenced by individual and shared student characteristics, such as their identities, values, past academic and personal experiences, and these characteristics shape how they experience CP courses leaving CP educational practitioners to adapt and respond.

Institutional requirements for instructors influence classroom practices by impacting capacity. Time constraints due to course load and class size (note that more than 50% of respondents were carrying six courses or more as their annual load; Kornbluh et al) impact what is possible in the classroom and on research teams. Perceived and actual job security, prior training in pedagogy, campus resources or lack thereof, individual social location, and systems of oppression (notably, sexism and racism among others) all factor into the construction and execution of courses.

### **Recurring Calls to the Field: Support Undergraduate Education by Valuing Undergraduate Educators**

When CP undergraduate instructors operate in isolation with limited professional support, we may be needlessly replicating challenges and iterating on questions that have been answered by many before us. Just as we develop frameworks for research practice in the complex conditions that inform CP research outside the university, so can we develop these for work within higher education. Each piece included in this Special Issue showcases potentials and challenges in undergraduate CP practice. The authors repeatedly call for more research, more conversation, and more support. We interpret this refrain as a call to the field to value undergraduate education and educators by doing more than simply inserting the word “undergraduate” into organizational documents. We need structural and practical changes.

We have an opportunity to create a meaningful culture shift within SCRA. We need not wait until students pursue Masters and PhDs to have impact. CP undergraduate competencies can be developed with undergraduate students and infused into undergraduate education. Concrete mindset shifts and skill development are happening. By engaging education as a site of social justice for students and communities and bringing CP practice into undergraduate settings, we can increase the reach and impact of community psychology.

Drawing on the findings and recommendations presented by the authors of articles in this collection, we identified the following opportunities for structural and resource shifts to support the growth of undergraduate CP practice. Furthermore, we hope to see an ongoing cycle of assessment and action in service of undergraduate education and ultimately in community-driven social justice.

**Include social justice teaching as a valued CP practice competency.** In this case teaching could be conceptualized as both classroom- and community-based education.

**Recognize and respond to the discrepancies in non-research workload demands and access to resources between colleagues at primarily research institutions and teaching institutions.**

Systemic inequities within the academy are not unique to community psychology. Adjunct professors, those in non-tenure track lines, those in tenure-track lines in non-research universities, and those that teach at primarily minority-serving institutions or outside the 4-year college and university system all face marginalization. Teaching institutions are not second class to research institutions. Professors of Instruction and Teaching (Adjunct, Lecturer, or otherwise labeled) are not second-class community psychologists. Educational practice is not an add-on to our professional work. Given our professed CP values, it is imperative that we acknowledge these factors and not replicate the hierarchies and inequities of the larger academic culture in our own behaviors and policies.

More specifically, relative to our colleagues in research-intensive doctoral granting institutions who may teach one or fewer undergraduate courses per year, there are significant barriers in workload and support for research at teaching institutions and across ranks within colleges and universities. These structural differences deserve acknowledgement and action from our professional organizations. If we, the undergraduate community psychology practitioners, are equal members of our organization, how will SCRA shift its practices to include us? For example, many of us had more access to conference travel dollars when we were graduate students in doctoral programs. This lack of funding paired with the cost of our conferences without sliding

scale accommodation or other creative adjustments is a classic case of structurally-determined exclusion. We need to think intentionally about (and take action on) the ways SCRA and other CP professional sites systematically exclude and isolate an entire subset of our professional population to help create more inclusive spaces for sharing our community psychology practices.

**Integrate Train-the-Teacher Institutes for Undergraduate Education.** At SCRA biennial and regional conferences off-biennial year, we suggest offering half or full day institutes on CP pedagogy and classroom practice. Institute instructors should receive reduced rate or free conference registration. This would increase access for individuals working at institutions that provide little to no professional development or travel dollars (most undergraduate institutions) while creating more opportunities to grow and disseminate CP pedagogy.

**Encourage and provide support for collaborating and publishing with undergraduates.** Just as we value publishing with our community partners, we should consider ways to flatten the hierarchy of higher education and pursue more participatory practices with students. Many undergraduate students are engaged in rigorous community practice and their work should be acknowledged and celebrated.

**Identify Scholarship of Teaching and Learning as relevant to our field and provide dedicated, ongoing journal space.** There's phenomenal work happening in CP classrooms; it needs a home. For archiving, for disseminating, for developing our distinctive iterations of CP pedagogy. We recommend that all CP journals (e.g., GJCPP, JCP, AJCP) create formal spaces dedicated to the scholarship of undergraduate teaching and learning in community psychology (or Undergraduate Community Psychology

Pedagogy & Research). Provide templates for submission to aid educators in translating their teaching practice into written scholarship. Expectations for such work are unclear. We need to define the genre for ourselves. When we are disseminating teaching practices, what kinds of information do we expect to see? At what stages of practice can someone share a strategy? What counts as data providing evidence for our claims?

Our journals can take cues from journals such as *Feminist Teacher* to develop author (and reviewer) guidelines. Based on our experience with this Special Issue, we suggest manuscripts on class-based practice provide detailed institutional and programmatic context (program and campus size, population served, mission and values, regional characteristics), author social location and connection to material, and specific course characteristics (e.g., course description, course size, learning objectives). See Cattaneo and colleagues in this volume for an exemplary model describing a specific class-based practice. Similarly, journals like *Psychology of Women Quarterly* solicit teaching resources related to empirical and theoretical articles. We recommend this approach to support undergraduate CP educators integrating new scholarship into courses.

Moreover, we suggest that when developing publishing opportunities, solicit thoughtful, critical reflection. Contrary to the empirical demand to prioritize publishing our successes, we wish to encourage intentional sharing of practices that did not work as well as naming challenges that are persistent and demanding. In this way, we can begin to normalize and visibilize the struggle that is undergraduate CP practice. Ideally, as a discipline we would generate creative, dynamic opportunities for practitioners to take up these challenges. These efforts might

take the form of an engaging column or an invited panel of practitioners who respond and reflect on ideas presented. Let us harness our journals and other platforms to continue developing conversations and communities of practice around undergraduate teaching and research.

### Conclusion

We are honored to hold space for the transformative, applied work of our colleagues. We are grateful for their integrity and the commitment they demonstrate in bringing community psychology practice into undergraduate settings. We also acknowledge this is a limited, North American-centric look at the work of undergraduate CP practitioners and students. There is much to uncover about the innovations of undergraduate CP educators across disciplines, geographies, ancestries, and other identities.

We end with a question: What would it look like to centrally value and support undergraduate education and research in SCRA? We can imagine a version of SCRA that values undergraduate education and practice, that grows the scholarship of CP pedagogy, and invests in undergraduate-focused practitioners. We look forward to an ever expanding commitment to this work from the broader Society for Community Research and Action.

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Undergraduate Community

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