Health Care through Community Engagement

WCU & Vecinos Farmworker Health Program: Collaboration and Partnership Lead to Community Results and Student Engagement

Faculty Karen Lunnen (klunnen@wcu.edu) and John Carzoli (jacarzoli@wcu.edu), along with four Doctor of Physical Therapy students engaged in a collaborative project with multiple state and national agencies (Vecinos Farmworker Health Program, North Carolina Agromedicine Institute, Arthritis Foundation - MidAtlantic Region, and North Carolina AgrAbility) for the purpose of: 1) assessing needs of migrant/seasonal farmworkers in western NC, 2) conducting a survey and musculoskeletal screen with farmworkers in the camps where they live, 3) analyzing data related to prevalence and type of musculoskeletal symptoms, 4) developing educational materials to help prevent musculoskeletal problems, 5) participating in an inter-professional, primary care model of service delivery for farmworkers, both on-site and at a university-based pro bono clinic, and 6) assisting with delivery of a curriculum for lay health workers developed by AgrAbility in collaboration with the National Arthritis Foundation.

About this collaborative project as an example of community engagement, Associate Professor Lunnen said, “The community engagement project and collaboration with multiple agencies/organizations serving the farmworker population has allowed us to involve students in a variety of unique opportunities to engage in inter-professional education and clinical work in a primary care model, increase their exposure to culturally diverse populations and develop/implement health promotion materials and programs. In collaboration with staff from Vecinos, we now focus the content of a professional development course on the farmworker population and the associated challenges and we have involved students in the community engagement work for the past seven years as the basis for a two-semester long major research project.” Assistant Professor Carzoli stated, “This project provides students with unique learning opportunities in important areas that are difficult to develop in the classroom alone, such as inter-professional communication and primary care practice, interagency collaboration, cultural competence, and translating research related to health promotion and prevention into practice to enhance the lives of migrant and seasonal farmworkers in western North Carolina. Students in this project collaborated with multiple stakeholders involved in farmworker health at the local, state, and national levels in addition to working directly with the farmworkers.”

If you would like your community engagement work recognized through the STAR Engagement Projects program, please submit your proposals through the Community-based Activities Faculty Survey administered annually in the spring semester from early April – late May.