

Bridging the Academic/Practice Divide: Facilitating Collaboration within Public Health

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Background-----

The 1988 Institute of Medicine report, *The Future of Public Health*, highlighted the division between public health education and practice. Academic health departments (AHDs) help to bridge this gap, bringing public health educators, researchers, and practitioners closer together. AHDs are formed by the formal affiliation of academic institutions and health departments. These collaborative partnerships aim to enhance public health education and training, research, and service, with an ultimate goal of building healthier communities.

Objectives-----

- ✧ To build a learning community to facilitate knowledge exchange and collaboration between public health academia and practice
- ✧ To explore the relevance and utility of "library" skills in nontraditional contexts



Academic Health Department Learning Community-----

A New Community of Practice

Launched in January 2011, the AHD Learning Community is a national community focused on AHDs. The community is made up of educators, researchers, and practitioners from across the country working together to support the development of AHDs. Community members share experiences and knowledge, learn from each other, and collaborate to identify and create resources for establishing, sustaining, and expanding AHDs.

AHD Learning Community activities include:

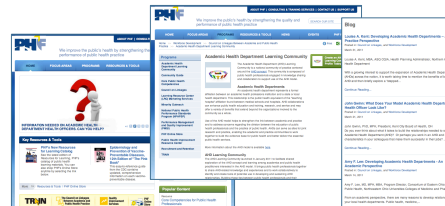
- ✧ Meeting to explore AHD topics
- ✧ Defining "academic health department"
- ✧ Compiling an AHD bibliography
- ✧ Creating member profiles
- ✧ Collecting partnership agreements
- ✧ Hosting a session at the APHA annual meeting



Community Building

Steps in AHD Learning Community development:

- ✧ Establishing an advisory workgroup
- ✧ Exploring published and grey literature
- ✧ Seeking advice and feedback from experienced public health professionals
- ✧ Communicating with community members
- ✧ Investigating online community models
- ✧ Holding workgroup and community meetings
- ✧ Promoting the community using traditional and social media
- ✧ Creating community spaces online



Information Management

Skills of information discovery, organization, synthesis, and dissemination have proven to be applicable far outside the traditional library setting. Information management has had a central role in the development of the AHD Learning Community.

Discovery:

- ✧ Locating AHD literature and resources
- ✧ Identifying online community models

Organization:

- ✧ Generating an AHD bibliography
- ✧ Building a collection of partnership agreements

Synthesis:

- ✧ Developing an AHD concept paper
- ✧ Producing promotional materials

Dissemination:

- ✧ Creating and maintaining community web pages
- ✧ Addressing information and resource requests

Conclusions-----

Enthusiasm for collaboration and learning communities is high in public health. More than 30 public health professionals volunteered to help organize the AHD Learning Community, and learning community membership has grown steadily without extensive promotion. Information management skills have been highly useful in coordinating the learning community, demonstrating that such skills remain relevant in nontraditional contexts.

Visit the AHD Learning Community at <http://www.phf.org/programs/AHDLCL>

