UMSAEP Post-ViPost Visit Report
Visit Dates January 27-February 6, 2013
By Lise Safran, MPH, MFA
Associate Director, MU MPH Program

Background:

The concept of global health relates to health issues and problems that reach beyond national borders and are best approached by international cooperation. Rapid and dramatic changes that have occurred over the past half-century in the spread of infectious disease, food security and safety and immigration and migration present persistent and distinct challenges to health and well-being in both developed and developing countries. Combining the interest of and need for increased international engagement among students at both MU and its longtime partner institution the University of the Western Cape, the time is ripe to explore the use of new technologies in the distance education of MPH and Post-Diploma (Graduate Certificate) students, as well as opportunities to allow students to engage with one another in real time. Since its founding six years ago, the University of Missouri’s MPH Program has expanded online and distance course offerings to 70% of core courses and was recently awarded a campus grant to develop a completely online pathway through the MPH program. The UWC School of Public Health has long focused on distance-education and short residency courses toward creating “a center for innovative ideas in public health education and research, and become a magnet for international health scholars,” (Alexander, L., Igumbor, E.U. and Sanders, D. 2009). Consequently, Dr. Igumbor and Lise Safran, Associate Director of the MPH Program at MU along with colleagues Dr. Kay Libbus and Ms. Jessi Hosey, worked to develop a proposal to explore specific technologies and opportunities that could be used to increase student engagement across programs. When Dr. Igumbor left UWC in FS12, Lucy Alexander, the UWC SoPH Academic Programme coordinator, became the primary project partner in South Africa.

Objectives

The immediate objectives of this collaborative activity were to explore opportunities that would:

- Provide an international learning experience for graduate public health students at MU (including medical students pursuing a Graduate Certificate in Global Public Health) who may not have the funding or flexibility to travel overseas.
- Offer MU students the opportunity to interact with UWC faculty on topics in their areas of research focus.
- Offer UWC students the opportunity to interact with graduate and medical students at MU while discussing topics such as health communications, on which the MU campus excels.
- Offer a springboard for future joint UWC-MU research projects between faculty with complementary research interests.
• Build faculty expertise in international distance education toward eventual future course offerings.

Preparations and Visit

In advance of my January visit to UWC, Jessi Hosey, Kay Libbus and I participated in a conference call with Ehi Igumbor and several UWC colleagues (Thandi Puoane, Thubelihle Mathole, Corinne Carolissen, Lungiswa Tsolekile) to discuss common interests and possible areas of collaboration. Dr. Igumbor subsequently left UWC and our primary contacts became SoPh Academic Programme Coordinator Lucy Alexander and Hazel Bradley, Senior Lecturer at SoPh who was both the convener of the introductory Public Health summer school course and the recipient of a UMSAEP grant to visit UMKC and MU during January of this year.

Upon my arrival at UWC, School of Public Health Faculty welcomed me and introduced me to faculty and staff and updated me on the offerings of the School. Subsequently, they assembled for an overview presentation on the MU Master of Public Health program, with particular focus on our expanding distance-education offerings and dual degrees. Our discussion touched on both the opportunities presented by advancing technology, particularly in light of the MU MPH Program’s grant application for online program funds (since awarded) and the desire of UWC faculty and staff to connect with SoPH alumni, perhaps by using this interaction with MU as a platform. We also further considered the possibilities raised for MU graduate public health students to study in Cape Town broached during the recent visit by Kristofer Hagglund and Ricki Orford. Over the next few days I met individually with the following SoPH faculty and the SoPH Director, Dr. Helene Schneider:

• Ms. Lucy Alexander
• Ms. Suraya Mohamed
• Professor Christina Zarowsky
• Ms. Hazel Bradley

Meetings with the additional UWC faculty and staff focused on the following related topics:

• Mr. Leolyn Jackson, Director, International Relations Office met with me to discuss ways in which to strengthen ties between our two universities and to facilitate an introduction to Dr. Lorna Holtman, Ms. Juliet Stoltenkamp and Ms. Diane Ferris.
• Ms. Juliet Stoltenkamp—Office of E-learning. Our discussion related to the potential compatibility of operating systems, most specifically the relative advantages of Sakai over Blackboard for use in our distance collaborations.
• Dr. Lorna Holtman, Director, Postgraduate Studies at UWC. Dr. Holtman’s previous distance learning collaboration with UMSL offers a number of potential best practices to guide any future MPH Program/SoPH discussion group, including the need to incorporate structured opportunities to address learning styles across cultures and the trouble-shooting of technical difficulties.
• Mr. Girard Filies- UWC Department of Health Sciences discussed UWCs community work with students in the townships and the possibility of further collaboration with MU student groups.
• Dr. Gail Hughes, Director, South African Herbal Science and Medicine Institute met with me to review a number of opportunities for collaboration that could be enhanced by joint learning and research including the possibility that MU students might enroll in her winter school courses.

Additional activities:
A primary purpose of my visit was to attend portions of the Introduction to Public Health Summer School Short Course for Postgraduate Diploma students. During my time at UWC I was able to visit several introductory lectures, as well as the session in the computer lab whereby participating students (from South Africa, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Seychelles and elsewhere) were introduced to the distance discussion group that they would be participating in over the course of the semester. Based on interaction with both faculty and staff, the conveners and I agreed to explore the possibility of beginning our collaboration by including a pilot group of MU MPH students in the Post Diploma discussion group of Globalisation and Health, to be held later in spring. The platform used by UWC (Google discussion groups) would be adopted by students and faculty at MU for the purposes of this pilot. As of this writing, the discussion group is planned for the week of April 20th. Four MU MPH students will be participating.

Having led study abroad students to Ghana in cooperation with ProWorld, I was also eager to make a site visit to the Pro-World partner that hosted an MU Nursing Study abroad group earlier in the year. The site visit included trips to the projects in two nearby townships, a visit to the work space in Capetown and a visit to the guest house in which the MU students had been lodged.

Finally, a lunch meeting with UWC faculty member and poet Dianne Ferrus (arranged by Leolyn Jackson) was a most welcome highlight of my visit to UWC.

Findings
Based on the discoveries and discussions afforded by this visit to UWC, the distance and technology collaboration will be going forward with the following priorities:
• To incorporate MU student involvement into the newly introduced electronic discussion format (Google Groups),
• To assist UWC, where possible, in offering the opportunity of connecting with MU faculty and students to alumni of SoPH,
• To incorporate open source platforms such as Sakia into the MU MPH Programs online program expansion (this being the platform employed by UWC, rather than Blackboard),
• To ensure that the equipment/expertise available to the MU MPH Program through the recently awarded Online Program Expansion grant is used to lay the groundwork for additional faculty research collaborations between the two schools, as well as the potential enrollment of small groups of MU MPH students in UWC winter school courses in public health.
Impressions/Recommendations
UWC faculty and staff were enormously welcoming to me and gracious during my visit, particularly Lucy Alexander who was preparing to go on a well-earned sabbatical. Following the visit, I am more convinced than ever that the potential for meaningful distance education opportunities between the SoPH and the MU MPH Program. The success of these efforts depends on a high-degree of flexibility and creativity on both sides. For example, the visit and the fruitful discussions I had there led me to the following adjustments in my thinking about the project:

- Rather than attempt to initiate the partnership with synchronous forums with students on both sides that are new to the process, the better path is to incorporate current students, where possible, into on-going asynchronous discussions, such as the Globalisation and Health Google group. These contacts can potentially be expanded later on to include synchronous opportunities for engagement either for on-campus students (during short courses) or for already engaged students who have returned home to pursue the distance course.

- As Blackboard is not likely to be a regular platform for UWC in the near future, efforts at linking the programs in that way will necessarily be temporary and provisional. UWC is currently adopting Sakai as an online platform, which is open source and thus also available to MU. Our program will be more flexible and compatible with international partners if we include expertise in Sakai in our faculty/student training and online expansion plans.

- At whatever level of engagement, efforts at distance communication for students and/or alumni offer opportunities to gain understanding in cross-cultural communication styles and international perspectives on global health issues. One of the many lessons learned by previous efforts is that explicitly incorporating learning objectives and opportunities for discussion/reflection on those topics is necessary and helpful.

Attachments:
A copy of Lise Saffran’s UWC visit schedule and a photograph of some SoPH faculty and staff with the visitor.
FACULTY OF COMMUNITY
AND HEALTH SCIENCES
School of Public Health

PROGRAMME FOR THE VISIT BY:

Ms Lise Saffran, Associate Director of the Masters in Public Health Program, School of Public Health at University of Missouri, Columbia, USA.

Her particular interest is to explore possible distance learning courses and placement opportunities for her students if they were to come to UWC

TUESDAY, 29 JANUARY 2013

09h30 - 10h00: Tea with SOPH team (Lucy, Helen, Hazel, Corinne)

10h00 - 11h30: Meet with Ms Lucy Alexander, Education Specialist and Prof Helen Schneider, Director, Ms Hazel Bradley, Senior Lecturer, Ms Corinne Carolissen, Snr Programme Officer (Student Admin), School of Public Health

11h45 - 13h00: Prof Loma Holtman, Director of Postgraduate Studies. Prof Bev Thaver, Higher Education, UWC

13h00: Lunch with Lucy Alexander and Gerard Filies, Service-Learning Coordinator, Interdisciplinary Teaching & Learning Unit, Faculty of Community & Health Sciences, UWC

14h45: Prof Gail Hughes, Director, South African Herbal Science & Medicine Institute (SAHSMI), University of the Western Cape, New Life Science Building, Core 1, Level 3

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UNIVERSITY of the WESTERN CAPE
WEDNESDAY, 30 JANUARY 2013

10h00 – 11h00  Mr Leolyn Jackson, Director: International Relations Office, University of the Western Cape (Will come to SOPH)

11h30 – 12h30  Ms Corinne Carolissen, Snr Programme Officer (Student Admin) and Ms Janine Kader, Administrative Officer (Student Admin)

12h45        Lunch with SOPH staff

14h00 – 15h00  Prof Trish Struthers, Ms Suraya Mohamed, Health Promotion team

15h00 – 16h00  Prof Thandi Puoane (tentative because of illness) and Lucy Alexander (Way forward)