

# THE EVOLUTION OF TEACHING ABOUT PLACE-BASED PUBLIC HEALTH IN WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA (WNC)

Travis Johnson, MD MPH; Sarah Thach, MPH; Ameena Batada, DrPH; Caitlin Turbyfill, BA; Amy Lanou, PhD

UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health, UNC Asheville, and UNC Health Sciences at MAHEC, Asheville, NC

## CONTEXT

- Asheville is located in the Appalachian mountains of WNC, a region more rural with higher rates of older adults, poverty, uninsured, and opioid overdose deaths than NC
- Despite some common disparities in rural populations, each rural community has a unique history, geography, traditions and values.<sup>1</sup> This calls for customized solutions that draw on local context
- Our goal is to deliver place-based theory in a placed-based educational model

## MPH DEGREE

Enrollment growth supported by NC Legislative funding

### Academic Partners:

- UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health in Chapel Hill
- UNC Asheville, NC's public liberal arts university
- Mountain Area Health Education Center, medical residency program & innovator in interprofessional education

## PLACE-BASED THEORY

We have developed the MPH curriculum with a place-based approach:

- Place-based public health starts by understanding the histories, traditions, spirituality, education, economy, geography, health care access and community orientation that influence structures, environments, and health behaviors of the place.<sup>2</sup>
- "Place-based education asks, 'Where am I? What is the nature of this place? What sustains this community?' Students become a part of the community, rather than a passive observer of it."<sup>3</sup>

## TEACHING PLACE-BASED

### Summers 2017 & 2018:

- Recruited 7 UNC-Chapel Hill MPH students and 4 UNC Asheville graduates for 240-hour summer internship
- Interns worked on public health projects with WNC institutions
- Weekly professional development sessions on opioid crisis in Appalachia, team-based care, health systems, and field trips to a rural health department and health coalition, a federally qualified health center, Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians' new hospital, and tour of urban renewal's impact on African Americans in Asheville



Dig In! Community Garden, Yancey County



Cherokee Indian Hospital

### Fall 2018:

- Launched UNC Gillings School's MPH Program in Asheville – students meet face-to-face one day a week so professionals can continue working; courses taught by Gillings, UNC Asheville, and WNC community faculty
- Leadership in Practice concentration
- Place-based theory integrated into:
  - Core courses (with WNC guest speakers)
  - Case studies
  - Practice and integrated learning experiences
  - WNC-specific courses on transformation at the individual, community, and systems levels
- Students learn public health principles in WNC context



## FUTURE PLANS

- Planning a degree to be jointly conferred by UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health in Chapel Hill and UNC Asheville
- Concentration: place-based community health transformation in a rural context
- Build public health capacity in WNC for WNC

## STUDENT RESPONSE

*"Just wanted to let you know how much I learned from the panel y'all put together today. The panels are the glue to the main concepts and competencies of the program."*

RE: Guest speaker panel

*"The implications of power, structural racism and socioeconomic discrimination became real and palpable for me during the tour, as we saw the map of the red[lined] zones while driving by the public housing."*

RE: Field trip

*"Although I have passed through [this] county many times, I have not had a reason to visit. This experience has changed my uninformed assumptions about rural states and places. Project details shared by the panel including love letters to ICE detainees, language justice, childcare availability and insistence on inclusivity of sexual orientation [in a community Statement of Unity] was surprising and comforting."*

RE: Field trip

1. Hart LG, Larson EH, Lishner DM. (2005). Rural definitions for health policy and research. *American Journal of Public Health, 95*(7):1149-55.  
 2. Macintyre S, Ellaway A, Cummins S. (2002). Place effects on health: how can we conceptualise, operationalise and measure them? *Social Science & Medicine, 55*(1):125-39.  
 3. Lane-Zucker L. (August 1, 2016). Place-based education, entrepreneurship and investing for an "impact economy." Retrieved from <https://yourmarkontheworld.com/place-based-education-entrepreneurship-investing-impact-economy/> on 2017-03-06.