

R e p o r t

HEALTH AND HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION IN ACADEMIC SETTINGS

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The Program on International Health and Human Rights at the Harvard School of Public Health and the University of New South Wales' Initiative for Health and Human Rights jointly hosted a one-day meeting in Boston to discuss health and human rights education in academic settings. Representing major research universities, government agencies, and some of the largest NGOs in the field, twenty-five prominent educators from around the globe came together to determine the various approaches, opportunities and challenges in Health and Human Rights education; establish the content specificities of teaching health and human rights courses; facilitate information exchange and communication processes to strengthen health and human rights teaching within and across institutions; and examine the interface between teaching and research in this fast growing field.

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HEALTH AND HUMAN RIGHTS

297

Linking Education on Health and Human Rights with Related Disciplines

Health and human rights academic teaching has expanded considerably in the last two decades: more institutions offer courses, more teachers have built the needed expertise and more students enroll in courses, whether required or elective. The field has now reached a stage where, having established its purpose and identity, stronger linkages between teaching in related disciplines would be beneficial. For example, training in health and human rights and in bioethics would bring these two fields closer, while drawing out the added—yet distinct—value of each.

Diverse, Yet Core Contents Can Be Defined

The sharing of experience, as well as format, methodology, syllabi, and other relevant educational materials related to more than 30 courses offered across the world reflected the variety of ways in which health and human rights is taught across institutions and disciplines. In general, courses can be characterized by the level of education they are intended to serve (undergraduate, graduate, doctoral, post-graduate); the faculty hosting the course (e.g. public health, medicine, law); the emphasis placed on particular health topics (e.g. general public health, reproductive and sexual health, environmental health); human rights focus (e.g. general, gender, torture); or specific populations (e.g. migrants, refugees, children). This diversity, which illustrates the richness of health and human rights, is also compounded by the ways courses are structured and conducted. For example, classroom dynamics and discussion are greatly affected by whether health and human rights courses are required or elective. Further, course format, readings, assessment tools, and the level to which guest speakers are incorporated, were recognized as key factors in determining the structures and outcomes of courses. As the meeting succeeded in bringing together experiences, course objectives, and materials from a variety of sources, a next step could be to define what constitutes the essential core content of health and human rights teaching allowing opportunity for further dialogue and collaboration.

Bridging Rhetoric and Practice

The need to provide students with skills across a range of disciplines to translate key principles and normative content into action-oriented work was clear. Participants discussed the challenges inherent to ensuring that students are optimally prepared to address health and human rights issues from the perspectives of law, medicine, public health, nursing, and other allied health and social sciences. Across these disciplines, there is a strong demand from students for methods and tools supporting the translation of health and human rights concepts into processes of change. Whether from an advocacy, legal, or historical perspective, these students will address human rights issues in their careers in different ways, and must be equipped for these tasks, and also encouraged and inspired to advance knowledge in the field.

Linking Education, Action, and Research

Health and human rights education, research, and practice are closely linked, one domain contributing to advancing knowledge and improving efficiency in the others. Common areas of research among meeting participants included: participatory and community-based fieldwork; priority-setting exercises; application of research to policy change; and empirical research into health and human rights education itself. Participants agreed that research into the relationships between health and human rights was desirable and closely linked to education. Novel ways of integrating approaches to research could call on complementary approaches: top-down (from policy to impact); bottom-up (from outcome to determinants); and horizontal (comparing the outcomes of different interventions). To this end, research methods should be drawn from a range of disciplines, in conjunction with existing health and human rights methods to help bring rigor into the classroom and attract a wider range of students to new and ongoing projects beyond the classroom.

Future Steps

In summary, the participants expressed their commitment and passion to expand health and human rights education, and the value of its framework to enhance the analytical and action-oriented capacity of projects across disci-

plines. Acknowledging the interests and demands of students, and reviewing the most effective methodologies to address their needs, provided fruitful discussion on ways in which health and human rights education, teaching, and research can be improved within and across different types of institutions. While course objectives and methodologies clearly differed across institutions, the value inherent to the sharing of syllabi and information was readily apparent to all participants and consensus was reached on the need to exchange information in order to strengthen future courses as well as to disseminate this information widely. Accordingly, the syllabi and other course materials collected in preparation for this meeting will be made publicly available and efforts will be undertaken to electronically link all those with interest in this subject. This is meant not only to enrich the teaching of those already engaged in the field, but to inspire new initiatives around the world.

The educational materials shared at the meeting, the list of known courses in health and human rights offered around the world, and related documents can be downloaded from the following websites:

- Program on International Health and Human Rights at the Harvard School of Public Health, <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/pihhr>.
- The University of New South Wales' Initiative for Health and Human Rights, <http://www.ihhr.unsw.edu.au>.

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