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Jane M. Gervasio

Butler University, jgervasi@butler.edu

Carriann E. Richey

Butler University

Bruce G. Hancock

Butler University

Iftekhhar Kalsekar


Butler University

Julie M. Koehler

Butler University

See next page for additional authors

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Recommended Citation

Gervasio, Jane M.; Richey, Carriann E.; Hancock, Bruce G.; Kalsekar, Iftekhhar; Koehler, Julie M.; and Andritz, Mary H., "Enhanced student learning and public health awareness through capstone projects" (2009). *Scholarship and Professional Work – COPHS*. Paper 19.

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Authors

Jane M. Gervasio, Carriann E. Richey, Bruce G. Hancock, Iftekhar Kalsekar, Julie M. Koehler, and Mary H. Andritz

Enhanced student learning and public health awareness through capstone projects

Jane M. Gervasio, Carriann E. Richey, Bruce G. Hancock, Iftekhar Kalsekar, Julie M. Koehler,
Mary H. Andritz

Background: Our vision is for students to be agents of change in society, the profession and in their careers. To achieve this vision we must model the premise that for an individual to flourish, one must enrich the life of the community. The faculty at Butler University College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences are actively involved in public healthcare initiatives promoting health and wellness, both on the university's campus and throughout the Indianapolis community, especially to the underserved. Longitudinal capstone projects are performed during the students' fourth professional year under the direction of faculty mentors with the goal of increasing student knowledge of the research process. We implemented a process to further enhance the students' learning by aligning the capstone projects with our faculties' public and underserved healthcare initiatives.

Innovation: Students who expressed both an interest in one of our ongoing health initiatives as well as an interest in furthering their education in research were identified for participation. Those students were placed in an experiential research rotation allowing them to actively develop and participate in research centered on public health initiatives.

Conclusion: Participation in the faculty-directed public health initiative research rotation not only introduces the student to the principles of research, but also serves to help the students recognize their responsibility to the public as future healthcare professionals. We believe that by exposing our students to a variety of populations, including the medically underserved, they are better prepared to make a difference and recognize additional opportunities for improved patient care.