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## “Practicing Public Anthropology at the CDC and Implications for Future Research”

by Sean Bruna, PhD

Cultural anthropology is currently in a sea of change and graduate students, such as myself, are exploring ways to make our research more relevant to the broader public. With this consideration in mind, I interned with Center for Disease Control and Prevention's National Diabetes Education Program (NDEP) in Atlanta, GA from June to August of 2007 under the guidance of Dr. Owens and Ms. Brooks-Griffin. The lessons I learned over the course of the summer would prove more valuable than I expected.

Over the course of the internship, I developed a structural outline for a diabetes-themed theater education training video for “*HOY en Adelante!*” a project initiated by the National Latina Health Network. The theater education project, or “Teatro Project” as it was affectionately called, was an innovative program designed to provide a means to educate both English and Spanish speaking individuals about diabetes in a variety of urban and rural contexts.

As the first researcher working on this project, it was my duty to ensure it met the CDC's “evidence based” standards. To ensure standards were met, I used traditional academic skills, namely preliminary and primary research techniques - literature reviews, examination of predominant and applicable theories, interviews, etc. – to draft an outline for a training video that will show how to develop and perform educational teatros. Considering both preliminary and primary research I outlined a video designed to show how to develop and prepare a teatro while simultaneously providing opportunities for participants to learn about diabetes. Unlike other materials produced by NDEP or other organizations, this video would serve both to educate and train in one easy to watch video. For example, rather than mention that participants should hold meetings for volunteers at their home, the video I designed would show individuals hosting a meeting, and when necessary, include an explanatory narration.

In addition to developing the training video, the internship gave me the opportunity to enhance my research methods and consider policy implications, both crucial components in my upcoming anthropological research.

After interning with the National Diabetes Education Program, I realized that I was casually using diabetes related vocabulary when speaking with individuals at my research site. This keyed me into a possible method I can use while I am in the field – code for individual language to observe if there is a correlation between diabetes related vocabulary and learning to maintain or prevent diabetes. For example, I hypothesize that when an individual begins consistently using diabetes related vocabulary (e.g. A1C, glucometer, etc.) they have reached a critical level of understanding about diabetes and are more likely to maintain healthy practices. Without the internship and training, I may not have considered what may turn into an interesting component of my study.

Perhaps the most important outcome from the summer is the recognition of how national programs are (or are not) addressing health inequalities among minority populations. Academic research, as I am well aware, is necessary to address and push for the needs of minority populations, Latinos/as included. After a summer at the CDC, however, I am beginning to realize that there are a limited number of scientific studies that address minority populations while simultaneously providing material that “policy makers” can easily use and apply. If we hope to close gaps in health inequalities, researchers must move beyond basic research and explore mechanisms which make our work more valuable to individuals within the policy arena.

I hope that my doctoral research can satisfy both needs – addressing minority health while also providing material for policy makers – in order to improve the health of minority peoples in the years to come.

I am grateful to HSHPS and the CDC for the opportunities that presented themselves over the course of the summer, and I encourage other graduate students to participate in the program. The lessons learned, both academic and professional, are invaluable as we continue to explore ways to reduce health inequalities among minority peoples.