

CIEE Action Plan

In response to the Academic Consortium Board (ACB) Evaluation of the Summer Community Public Health (CPH) Program at the CIEE Study Center at the University of Botswana, Gaborone, Botswana

July 14, 2013

Overview

CIEE staff are pleased to provide this Action Plan in response to the Academic Consortium Board (ACB) report on the Summer Community Public Health program at the CIEE Gaborone Study Center in Gaborone, Botswana. The evaluation report was received by members of the ACB at the Fall 2012 meeting.

The Action Plan outlines the key recommendations from the Evaluation and the specific steps CIEE plans to follow to address the recommendation. While the Action Plan is authored by CIEE, staff solicited input from the ACB team leader from the evaluation, Nancy Kanach. The Action Plan should be read in light of the ACB Evaluation and with reference to the detailed description of the programs available from CIEE. The "ACB Plan for Program Evaluation," the Evaluation report, the Action Plan, and program details are available at www.ciee.org.

Evaluation of the Summer Community Public Health Program the CIEE Study Center at the University of Botswana, Gaborone, Botswana

Summer 2012

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

According to the CIEE website, current at the time, the summer Community Public Health Program in Gaborone is "designed for students with an interest in public health issues in developing countries; the governmental, societal, and environmental factors that influence healthcare; and international health issues including HIV/AIDS. Students should expect to learn about overcoming challenges in healthcare in the context of a developing nation."

The program attracts a group of highly motivated students who are eager to learn more about public health through classroom instruction and from firsthand experience in clinics, both urban and rural. To enable them to understand the context in which they are living and studying, students are afforded the opportunity to learn the basics of Setswana language and to gain an understanding of Botswana culture through lectures and field trips that are scheduled throughout the program. Students learn as well by living with either graduate students in dorms on the UB campus or with home-stay families.

The program has all the right elements that together should provide students with a thoroughly satisfying and challenging program. The cultural and linguistic aspects of the program are in good shape, but the courses on public health are in need of review. They need more focus, clear assignments, and individual as well as group projects. The two courses could also be better integrated with one another.

The faculty who teach the courses are well qualified in their areas of expertise but could use help with other aspects of public health teaching. The Resident Director (RD) works tirelessly to coordinate courses and to arrange clinical placements, field trips, lectures, and home stays while being available 24/7 to the students. It is a tall order for essentially one person, especially in a country where not all goes according to plan. Although there is a part-time assistant, there is no space for that person to work at the CIEE Study Center, making it challenging to coordinate projects and share responsibilities. Students have complained in the past that lectures or field trips were cancelled unexpectedly. During this visit, we witnessed one such event, as a trip to the Jwaneng Diamond mine had to be cancelled because it was unexpectedly fully booked. Students had difficulty understanding why all the bookings weren't confirmed well in advance of their arrival.

The team believes that the program has great potential. Botswana is an ideal place for such a program. It is a stable country that places a high priority on its citizens' health even as it faces the challenges of HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis. UB, which is investing in a new teaching hospital and a new School of Public Health, is the perfect partner for the program. The new College of Health Sciences will have under its umbrella the Schools of Medicine, Nursing, Public Health, and Allied Health Professions.

When the program started four years ago, there were few faculty members who could be asked to teach in the field of public health. Now in the Department of Environmental Health and in the new Department of Public Health alone, there are 18 faculty members (although some are on leave). Furthermore, CIEE has the support of the new School of Public Health, according the acting head of the school. He has given assurances that CIEE is linked to the school as a whole and not just to certain individuals who teach in the program. In the future the links with the School of Public Health might even be strengthened and expanded.

The program's real strength is the opportunity it offers students to observe and sometimes participate in health care delivery in the country, both in an urban and rural setting. Combining such field experiences with classroom work and reflective exercises produces effective learning when done right.

The recommendations that the evaluation team has outlined in this report focus most on reviewing and revising the academic components of the program and on the organizational and academic challenges of running a summer program of seven weeks (and five teaching weeks) that has a number of ambitious learning goals.

ACB Recommendation:

Redesign the Introduction to Public Health course to ensure all major disciplines of public health are introduced to students in relation to major health issues in Botswana. Currently the course structure is predominantly environmental health. Use of guest lecturers with varying public health expertise is recommended.

CIEE Action:

There was a change in leadership within the CIEE Gaborone Study Center in 2013. The new Resident Director has an MPH degree and is implementing various changes to the course syllabi for both the CIEE summer and semester Community Public Health (CPH) programs. CIEE staff are working with the professor of this specific course to implement the recommended changes.

ACB Recommendation

CIEE should hire an academic director or seek course oversight (including redesigning the course) from someone with a strong and broad public health background. Someone with at least a Masters in Public Health and knowledge of local issues and challenges would be ideal.

CIEE Action

As previously mentioned, CIEE Gaborone hired a new Resident Director in 2013. The RD is originally from Botswana but spent 10 years living in the U.S. She has two Masters Degrees, one in Public Health and one in International Affairs with a focus on African Studies. This new RD has proven very effective in her first few months with CIEE and has actively worked with local faculty to address the academic concerns address in this report. CIEE Gaborone has two additional full-time resident staff who can help provide additional support to the students on this program.

ACB Recommendations

The syllabus should be finalized before students arrive and include only material that can reasonably be covered given a compressed schedule as well as project assignments and deadlines. Students should be assigned required readings and this should be reflected in the syllabus. The order of topics presented should not be random; rather topics should build upon each other.

To ensure that students stay engaged (most are advanced undergraduate students), instructors should include a final exam for the course and some individual projects; minimize passive learning; and include more interactive learning such as discussions of local case studies and role playing that stimulates critical thinking. The instructors should explore integrating the course better with the Community Public Health Practicum, e.g., students might engage in mini-research projects during clinical placements (e.g., observing or reviewing clinical records), guest lectures, mini-field trips relevant to class lectures, etc.

CIEE Action

CIEE implemented these recommendations in 2013. Updated syllabi now indicate the specific assignments, including the final exams, individual projects, guest lectures, mini research projects, and local case study discussions. Syllabi will be reviewed again prior to the 2014 summer program and updated as necessary.

ACB Recommendation

Instead of two full days of clinical placements every week, have students attend clinics for half a day, Monday through Thursday and use afternoons for lectures, project discussions/updates, etc.

CIEE Action

CIEE implemented this recommendation in summer 2013 and received a very positive response from the students. CIEE is considering ways to implement a similar approach within its semester CPH program.

ACB Recommendation

In addition to journals, students should be assigned an individual research project as soon as they start classes. Class meetings should provide guidance on developing individual projects as well as discussing students' clinical experience. At least half of the grade should be based on individual assignments.

CIEE Action

This does take place in the form of 'mini' research projects. CIEE staff provide guidance on how to prepare a research proposal, and each student submits one as their final.

ACB Recommendation

Students should be invited to comment formally on their experience in the program about halfway through so that issues might be addressed while the students are still at the site.

There should be a student blog on the website describing life in Gaborone and the program's activities.

CIEE Action

CIEE staff are in regular communication with students about their experience and hold both formal and informal gatherings to allow for student feedback on courses, housing, and cultural activities.

CIEE Gaborone has encouraged students to participate in a program blog. Summer 2013 students were actively engaged in blogging. Please click [here](#) for more on the 2013 CIEE Gaborone Summer Community Public Health student blog.

ACB Recommendation

CIEE needs to encourage the University of Botswana leadership to fulfill their promises to provide more space, especially as the program grows.

CIEE Response

As of fall 2013, the University of Botswana has allocated new office space to the CIEE Study Center on the university campus. These new facilities will help CIEE to provide better support to students and allow for staff expansion as the semester and summer program enrollments grow.