SPARCing Change: Adventures of a Student Advocacy Group at JHSPH

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Learning Objectives
You will be able to:
1. Create & sustain a student advocacy group
2. Think strategically about advocacy goals and mobilization activities appropriate for your own institution
3. Develop & implement student-led activities to promote community engagement

Presentation Overview
- About SPARC
- SPARC’s Formation
- Group Identity & Infrastructure
- Strategies
- Major Activities
- Successes & Challenges
- Sustainability

SPARC = Students for a Positive Academic Partnership with the East Baltimore Community

East Baltimore
East Baltimore Community
- Urban
- Pop. ~100,000
- Predominantly African-American
- 84% annual income <$20,000¹
- 13% unemployed¹
- Rich in community organizations and leaders committed to improving quality of life in the community

¹ - Gomez and Muntaner, 2005

Health of East Baltimore
- Redevelopment, demolition & displacement
- Environmental health threats²
  - Lead poisoning
  - Rodents
  - Vacant and dilapidated housing
- Disproportionate burdens of disease³
  - Asthma
  - Cancer
  - CVD, diabetes
  - STDs & HIV
  - Substance abuse
  - Violence

² - Farfel et al, 2003; ³ - Fox et al, 2004

Vision
SPARC envisions an institutional commitment at JHSPH to improving the health of the East Baltimore community through sustained, reciprocal community-academic partnerships based upon a foundation of mutual respect and trust.

Mission
SPARC is a JHSPH student advocacy group promoting greater institutional commitment to the East Baltimore community.

We advocate for:
1. Improved training opportunities in community-based research and public health practice for JHSPH students through sustained, reciprocal community-academic partnerships; and
2. A greater investment of JHSPH institutional resources in supporting East Baltimore community organizations and improving the health of East Baltimore residents.
Organizational Structure

Executive Committee
10 Members
General Membership
Curriculum Committee
Mobilization Committee

Igniting the SPARC
- Spring 2005: "Stop Snitching" film
- Small group of students, EJP & SOURCE form informal group
- Strategy: Engage in student-led activities to create culture change at JHSPH, emphasizing social responsibility & engagement with the East Baltimore community

What could students do?

Survey
- May 2005: Student body online survey
  - Sponsored by SOURCE
  - N = 282 (16%)
- Strategy: Collect data to identify & publicize student support
- Assessed student attitudes about:
  - Personal Involvement in the Community
  - Institutional Responsibility to the Community
  - Promoting Engagement

Personal Involvement in Community

"As public health professionals, we bear a responsibility to the communities where we study and work."

70% of respondents wanted to increase their level of involvement with the East Baltimore community

Barriers to Involvement

Q3. Types of barriers

- Not enough time
- Don’t know how to find out about opportunities
- Not sure current opportunities help community
- Not welcomed
- Not safe
- Not valued by faculty/admin
- No transportation
- Other (please specify)
Institutional Responsibility to the Community

"Considering the vast resources available at Hopkins, Baltimore should be the healthiest city in the world."

JHSPH has a responsibility to be more involved in the East Baltimore community.

Community involvement is an integral component of public health education.

JHSPH's lack of emphasis on community involvement is contrary to the philosophy of public health.

Promoting Engagement

There are many rewarding research insights and partnerships waiting for us if we had faculty leadership that would be willing to mentor students and work with the community.

Disseminating Results

- Strategy: communicate that many students share these views
- Students
  - Student listserv
  - SA presentation
- Faculty
  - Faculty listserv
- Administration
  - Deans for Students Network (DFSN) presentation
  - Town hall meetings with the Dean
  - "Promoting Partnerships" report to the Administration

What was our next step?

"Promoting Partnerships" Report

- "Promoting Partnerships between the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health and the East Baltimore Community: Student Perspectives and Recommendations for Action"
- September 2005
- Three sections:
  - Survey findings
  - Rationale for immediate action
  - Recommendations for action
- Presentation to Associate Dean, shared with the Dean

Developing a Group Identity

- Fall 2005
- Strategy: Needed for public presence, future communications
- Group name
  - "student" action
  - "positive"
  - "partnership"
- Clarified and formalized goals
  - Mission and vision statements
Infrastructure

- Communication
  - Website
  - Listserv for general membership
  - Open meetings 1x/term

- Formal SA student group status, May 2006
  - SA website link
  - SA funds
  - Student groups fair for new students
  - Co-sponsorship of activities

Infrastructure/Sustainability

- Constitution
  - Organizational structure
  - Leadership duties
  - Operating procedures
  - Membership guidelines
  - Nominating new EC members

Impact?

- SPARC recognized as offering a valuable student perspective on community involvement
- SPARC invited to participate in ongoing conversation at JHSPH on community engagement
- No further dialogue between SPARC and the administration about our recommendations
- No visible direct response to recommendations

SPARC’s Responses

I. Use Existing Systems at JHSPH
II. Take on a Leadership Role Outside Established Systems

What could we do, as students, to motivate a direct and comprehensive response?
I. Work the System

- **Strategy:** Use existing systems for change at JHSPH to catalyze a response
  1. Official student group status
  2. Student Assembly Resolution
  3. Participate in JHSPH committees
  4. Participate in student organizations

2. Resolution, May 2006

- "Resolution to Support a Greater Institutional Commitment to Improving Public Health in East Baltimore"
- Called on administration to “adopt an institution-wide commitment to help improve the health of East Baltimore residents”
- Proposed action steps:
  1. Planning: Create strategic planning group
  2. Representation: Include student and community representatives on planning group & other committees
  3. Communication: Communicate with students and community about JHSPH activities in East Baltimore

• Strategies:
  - Early win
  - Demonstrate support of entire student body for recommendations
    - Unanimously approved by SA
  - Propose an action plan for administration
  - Use SA to engage administration
    - SA agreed to support implementation by facilitating dialogue between students and administration

2. Resolution, cont’d

• Dissemination
  - Dean for Students attended meeting and immediately shared news with other deans
  - Publicized to student-l, faculty-l, SPARC-l
  - Suggestions Box in school café to publicize resolution and create interest

3. Participate in JHSPH Committees

- **Strategy:** Influence organizational culture

- Current participation:
  - Deans For Students Network
  - Applied Public Health executive committee
  - DrPH program executive committee
  - HPM Committee on Public Health Practice
  - JHSPH Diversity Director search committee
  - UH% Director search committee
  - Steering Committee for CEPH re-accreditation
  - CEPH re-accreditation review committee for service

4. Participate in Student Organizations

- **Strategies:**
  - Influence organizational culture through students
  - collaborate on goals

- Current participation:
  - Student Assembly
  - PFFH student organization
  - HPM student coordinating committee
  - Rose Street Tutoring Program
II. Take on a Leadership Role Outside the System

- Students can lead change at their academic institutions
- Students can advocate in ways that faculty, staff and community allies cannot

Leadership Role

1. Initiated collaboration with faculty for curriculum development
2. Sponsored an event to stimulate dialogue with community
3. Created petitions calling for institutional response

1. SPARC/Faculty Collaboration
- Developed and circulated list of community engaged courses
- Strategies:
  - Good faith contribution to CEPH re-accreditation
  - Provide a tool to faculty and administration allies to identify existing courses and gaps for curriculum development work

1. Chat ’n’ Chew, December 2006
- Breakfast discussion with faculty allies about how to work together to develop community-engaged curriculum
- Strategies:
  - Students can advocate for change to support faculty efforts
  - Student voice may provide added incentive
  - Capitalize on faculty expertise and access

2. Community Dialogue at JHSPH
  - Ralph Moore, community activist
  - Introduced by faculty member
  - ~300 faculty, students, community members attended
  - Discussed what JHSPH can do to support health in East Baltimore
- Strategies:
  - Bring community voices into the school
  - Create dialogue
3. Two Petitions
1. In support of Resolution
2. Requesting resources for Rose St. program
   - Paired with Ralph Moore event
   - ~80 students, faculty, community members signed each
   - Strategies:
     - Put Resolution back on agenda
     - Demonstrate broader support for Resolution
     - Propose a simple way for JHSPH to invest in East Baltimore through Rose St. program

Successes

SPARC Organized a Student Voice
- Demonstrated strong student interest in:
  - East Baltimore’s health
  - The School’s responsibility to the community
  - Community-engaged training
- Created a unified public voice for students to influence institutional policy
- Created a go-to organization for student representation on these issues

Partnerships with Faculty
Collaborating to develop proposals for:
- Certificate in community-based and practice-based public health
  - SPARC will re-administer student survey with new questions about curriculum
- Schoolwide lecture series on community-engaged scholarship
  - Recognize JHSPH faculty who do this work
  - Include outside experts to inspire JHSPH students and faculty

Schoolwide Influence
- Garnered support of many administrators and faculty:
  - Circulated report, Resolution, course list
  - Invited SPARC to serve on committees
  - Proposed to conduct student survey annually
  - Collaborating on curriculum development activities
- Participated in schoolwide committees
- Catalyzed changes in Student Assembly:
  - Baltimore Week, fall 2006
  - VP for Community Affairs, fall 2006

Challenges
• Despite new VP position, Student Assembly did not support implementation of Resolution
• No direct response from administration to Resolution
• Unclear of actual impact of our efforts vs. a broader trend occurring at JHSPH
• We have not partnered with community members as much as we would like
• Difficulty increasing active SPARC membership
  _ Low attendance at Ralph Moore follow-up meeting
  _ Must bring in new leadership to ensure sustainability

Future Plans
• Renew attention to Resolution proposals
• Advocate for JHSPH to adopt CBPR principles as an institution
• Advocate for JHSPH to recruit more workers from East Baltimore
• Keep a history of SPARC
• Sustain and communicate about SPARC to JHSPH community, East Baltimore community, and students internationally

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Discussion
• How can students involve community members in changing their schools?
• What are effective ways to mobilize students?
• What roles can faculty play in creating change?
• How can we get the administration to respond?