Wisconsin Express
May 23-27, 2011

SUMMARY REPORT
Overview

Wisconsin Express is a one-week cultural immersion experience designed to give health professions students the opportunity to study firsthand the diverse local and regional healthcare resources and challenges in one of Wisconsin’s urban or rural communities. The 2011 program maintained the participation level at 9 sites with 69 students this year.

Wisconsin AHEC covers the majority of the cost of student participation, including workshop fees; instructional materials; shared accommodations in hotel rooms, bed and breakfasts, or lodging maintained by a community organization; and transportation during the week. Participants pay a $75 confirmation fee and the cost of some meals.

STUDENT PARTICIPANTS

The 69 students were selected from a record number of applicants (225) enrolled in a range of health professions programs across Wisconsin.

SITES

Each site group was multicultural and interprofessional in composition.

- Ashland
- Beloit / Janesville
- Green Bay
- La Crosse
- Milwaukee
- Rhinelander / Lac du Flambeau
- Sheboygan – Hmong focus
- Stevens Point
- Stevens Point – Amish focus

Mary Bumann, RN, MA
Senior Outreach Specialist in the AHEC statewide program office, has administered Wisconsin Express since 2004.

Her task has been to design and implement the publicity, recruitment, applications and assignments, and to find and circulate site coordinator and student related resources.

This report marks the culmination of her 8-year tenure. During that time, the program has doubled in size, and expanded to enhance an emphasis on specific community and regional interprofessional collaboration and innovation, as well as the ongoing challenges of providing effective healthcare across a culturally diverse Wisconsin.

Mary’s particular interest is in promoting self and collective efficacy in interprofessional teamwork for practitioners across the spectrum of professions and practice settings. She believes that to reach an effective outcome, every interaction must also include an intention to understand a shared humanity.
Program Activities

Our intention is to acquaint students with a variety of regional health care issues and provide opportunities to interact with local practitioners and recipients of health care services.

IMMERSION EXPERIENCES

The health care challenges and innovations within each site are unique, and student activities vary according to the character of the region. During summer 2011, highlights included:

• Beloit Police Department Drug and Gang Unit presentation
• Visit to Good Earth organic meat farm (affiliated with Amish co-ops)
• Meeting with a Mennonite physician
• Meeting with a doctor of Chinese medicine / acupuncture
• Tour of La Clinica, a multicultural multi-service free clinic in Wautoma
• Freedom House homeless shelter presentation; dinner with residents
• Bad River Indian Reservation clinic tour and Dancing 101 event
• Milwaukee Public Schools shadowing experience with a school nurse
• Tour of grocery store serving Hmong and Amish communities
• Domestic violence shelter tour and discussion at Bakakwsen i Shkwadem (“Door is Always Open” / Potowatomi Reservation)
• Disability awareness cook-out
• Tour of Amish school, homes, and shops; discuss Amish health care
• Participation in Salvation Army screening clinic

REFLECTION

At the end of the week, students actively reflect on their experience in journal entries. Students write responses to these questions:

1. What was your most significant or remarkable experience this week?
2. How might your experiences this week affect your future practice as a health professional?

Examples of their reflections are featured in this report (see sidebar).

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Site Descriptions

ASHLAND
Becky Birchmeier, RN, MS - Nursing
8 student participants

In Ashland and Bayfield counties, students see a variety of health care settings: women’s health, Bad River health, Red Cliff health/dental, medical and behavioral health, long term care, public health, and others. They explore diversity through Northland College’s Native American studies department. Various practitioners present system innovations and challenges. Community leaders share the history, economics and appeal of Northern Wisconsin.

BELOIT / JANESVILLE
Angela Flickinger, MPH, RD, CPT
6 student participants

The Beloit/Janesville site offers students an opportunity to study and explore rural and urban issues related to health care and diversity in the region. Various organizations and health care disciplines offer students experiences focusing on the Hispanic, African American, uninsured/underinsured, homeless, and rural populations.

GREEN BAY
Chris Vandenhouten, PhD, RN
6 student participants

The Green Bay site offers students an opportunity to explore the diverse cultures in this area of the state, which include the Native American culture of the Oneida Nation and the Hispanic communities. Students also get first-hand experience with uninsured, underinsured, and homeless populations and spend time with health and social service providers.

LA CROSSE
Robert A. Milisch, MEd, RRT
6 student participants

The La Crosse site gives students an overview of the background and health care needs of the Hmong and Amish populations in the area. Students meet with a physician who treats Amish patients, an Amish apothecary and visit Amish homes and shops. Students learn about traditional rituals from a Hmong shaman. Students participate in a community free clinic serving those with chronic illnesses who cannot afford traditional care. Students visit and participate in the activities of a homeless shelter.

MILWAUKEE
Suzanne Letellier, MEd
12 student participants

At the Milwaukee site, students explore issues related to culture and health care access while interacting with a variety of health disciplines. Several community-based organizations host the team. Students interact with Milwaukee’s Hispanic, African American, and Hmong communities and those who are homeless or participating in AODA programs. Students also interact with health professionals who work with underserved populations.

“Not only did I enjoy meeting the other people in my group and learning about their backgrounds and cultures; I also really enjoyed the YWCA safehouse experience. I don’t think I’ll ever forget seeing the tiny handprints of the victims of physical and/or sexual abuse. This community has so many wonderful resources for low income people. At the YWCA, I was physically overcome with emotions. It was quite heart-breaking to see.”

– Beloit/Janesville participant
Site Descriptions (continued)

RHINELANDER / LAC DU FLAMBEAU  
Gail Nelson, MA  
7 student participants

The Rhinelander/Lac du Flambeau site offers students opportunities to consider health care issues facing rural and Native American communities in the Northern Highland region of Wisconsin. Students explore key health concerns such as chronic illness, obesity, substance abuse, and domestic/sexual violence. Participants interact with professionals who experience the challenge as well as the satisfaction of serving these populations.

SHEBOYGAN – HMONG FOCUS  
Jill Niemczyk, BS  
12 student participants

Approximately 6,000 Hmong live in Sheboygan. A health needs assessment (2000) documented serious problems in health care access and health literacy in this population. The Hmong Community Center has implemented a number of unique programs addressing these needs. Along with learning about the programs, students enjoy a rich cultural experience gaining first-hand knowledge of Hmong history, culture and traditional health beliefs.

STEVENS POINT  
Jasia Steinmetz, PhD, RD  
6 student participants

The Stevens Point site offers students a variety of experiences designed to illustrate the health care needs of low income, Hmong, Native American, and Hispanic residents of Stevens Point and surrounding rural communities. Students explore services that are available in Central Wisconsin including a free health clinic serving low income, uninsured and migrant populations, and a shelter where students learn about aspects of shelter operation.

STEVENS POINT – AMISH FOCUS  
Kristen Lucas, MS  
6 student participants

The Stevens Point-Amish site offers students opportunities to learn about Amish culture and rural health care practice. Central Wisconsin has a significant Amish and Mennonite population in four counties. Students visit families, businesses, public agencies, and health care providers in Amish/Mennonite communities to explore how respect for culture can interact with state-of-the-art health care. They learn about the balance between cost of medical care and reduction of risk.

“This experience opened my eyes to the many difficulties in reaching underserved populations, and the collaborative efforts that people have come up with to address these problems.”  
– La Crosse participant

“What made the most impact on me was the children at the Salvation Army (homeless shelter). My heart is aching seeing children and parents in such need. Childhood should be as easy, carefree time and for these children to be in a shelter, worried, is heart-breaking.”  
– La Crosse participant

“We got a good ‘insider’s view’ of Amish / Mennonite culture, and an idea of what kind of commitment and skills are needed to gain access to this community.”  
– Stevens Point (Amish) participant

“I had never really given much thought as to how a health care provider needs to adapt to a patient who is from a culture other their own. I have been given the experiences and tools to do that, through this program.”  
– Sheboygan participant

“In order to have a healthy and prosperous community, we need to work together. Differences must not be disregarded, but respected and appreciated.”  
– Rhinelander/Lac du Flambeau participant
Wisconsin Express is a Wisconsin AHEC program.

Join us next year!

2012 WISCONSIN EXPRESS
Sun. May 20 – Fri. May 25 (tentative)

Applications available online beginning in December 2011: www.ahec.wisc.edu

Applications due: Friday, February 24, 2012

Early applications encouraged!

For more information, contact:
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About Wisconsin AHEC

The Wisconsin Area Health Education Center (AHEC) program is a health professions education and outreach program supported by the State of Wisconsin, federal grants, the state's health professions training programs, and local communities. It is part of a nationwide network of programs for improving accessibility and quality of primary health care. The national program was designed to encourage universities and educators to look beyond their institutions to form partnerships that meet community health needs, working toward the goal of decentralizing health professions training and linking communities with academic health centers in partnerships to promote cooperative solutions to local health problems.

The Wisconsin AHEC System consists of seven regional centers located in Manitowoc, Milwaukee, Madison, Cashton, Wausau, Superior, and Marinette. Each center operates under the direction of its own governing board. A statewide program, located in the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health, administers state and federal contracts to the centers and maintains several statewide programs. Representatives from the seven centers, health professions programs and community at-large members all come together in a 22 member statewide board that meets quarterly to set overall program objectives and review progress.

Wisconsin AHEC programs serve all the health professions programs in the state. Over the last 20 years, project partnerships have included (in addition to the two medical schools) over 20 BSN nursing programs, eight advanced degree nursing programs, three physician assistant programs, three social work programs, the UW School of Pharmacy, the MPH programs, and a range of allied health and preprofessional programs at the 13 UW System campuses, 21 private colleges, two tribal colleges and 13 UW System two-year campuses.

Wisconsin AHEC Centers collaborate regionally with the Wisconsin Technical College System (16 colleges with 47 campuses and numerous outreach centers) particularly the campuses offering associate degree nursing programs and a variety of other health professions technical training programs. Wisconsin AHEC has also worked with family practice residencies sponsored by the UW SMPH, Medical College of Wisconsin and La Crosse-Mayo programs, with a particular focus on the rural training track programs.

Regional centers provide a range of programs and services in their regions. Program areas include the following:

- Enhancing the learning experience for all health professions students at community-based sites, with an emphasis on interdisciplinary programs, developing cultural effectiveness, and technology support;
- Supporting health careers recruitment program in underserved rural and urban areas, to assist high school and college students from under-represented populations prepare for entry into health professions schools;
- Supporting faculty mentors and preceptors at community-based training sites with continuing education, technology support and other services to enhance the practice environment and maximize the ability of health professionals in underserved communities to provide high quality health care; and
- Partnering with local organizations in a variety of outreach activities to improve the health of the community.