

## Examples of Projects

See also: [Course Syllabus](#) | [Course Schedule](#) | [Course Goals & Overview](#)  
[Examples of Projects](#) | [Student Comments](#)

As a first time course taught on an experimental basis, the class attracted fewer students than we anticipate will enroll in the course in the future. The small number of students was beneficial for a first time offering, however, since it allowed us to have greater flexibility for making adjustments along a path we had not taken before.

Below is a sampling of three PAR projects in which students participated.

### Bellingham Public Library Project

Rowenn Kalman, a graduate student, worked with core stakeholders of the public library on an ongoing project of investigating what patrons of the Bellingham Public Library would like a new, expanded library to include. When Rowenn joined the core stakeholders as a co-researcher, three main questions were generated to be asked of library patrons:

1. What services have you experienced in other libraries that you would like to have?
2. How would you envision the library in 2020 and beyond?
3. What would encourage you and others to use the library more?

The core stakeholders wanted input from four distinct demographic groups: newcomers to the community, home school families, families with pre-school aged children, and technology-savvy people. Members of these four groups were asked to collaborate in the research via focus groups. Together they generated suggestions, ideas, and new questions. Suggestions for possible future changes included:

1. Longer checkouts for home-schooled students
2. Continued use of latest technology
3. Playground, atrium, study rooms and possibly a café built into the library

Suggestions for what would encourage greater use of the library included:

1. Research assistance
2. Community Center aspects
3. Getting the word out about programs

Some other key findings from the PAR project were:

1. Internet use and accessibility from home is essential.
2. The library is an important community center.
3. Books are still, and should continue to be, the focus of the library.
4. The children's library and children's programming is a central function.
5. The ambience of the library (as a pleasant place to be) is important.
6. Helpful staff is important.

Through the PAR process, core stakeholders were also able to discover important new questions and consider novel approaches to involve stakeholders in the Bellingham community with the library project. A greater sense of community was facilitated among library users who were invited to contribute to the overall vision and progression of the new library project.

### Whatcom Center for Early Learning Project

Lana Regat, an undergraduate student, worked with WCEL, a center for preschool children with special needs and their parents. The PAR project was a prelude to a much larger project that the center hopes to launch in their need to find new sources of funding to accommodate their expanding target population and to develop stronger ties with the greater Whatcom County community. These goals are driven by a need to obtain funds to facilitate an expansion of the center's federally mandated but unfunded services. The objective of the PAR project was to build a body of research

that could reflect the effectiveness of the early intervention services of WCEL. Little work had been done substantiating the effectiveness of early intervention programs for parents with preschool children who have special needs. The questions that the core stakeholder group wanted to research included:

1. How effective are birth to three services?
2. What is the community's perception of WCEL?
3. Is WCEL meeting the needs of the community?
4. How can WCEL raise public awareness of their program and its importance to the health of the greater Bellingham/Whatcom County community?
5. Who are possible funders?

Together with a group of student interns from a Western Washington University *Community Health* class who looked to Lana as both mentor and co-researcher, the PAR project involved interviews with parents and preschool teachers. A key finding of the PAR project was that WCEL is meeting the needs of preschool teachers and parents. However, parents would like and need extended services, and preschool teachers would like a longer transition period from WCEL services and school services. Lana compiled a resource library for fundraising and marketing research as well as a body of research articles and web sites relevant to birth-to-three services. The PAR project has contributed to the overall larger project that the core stakeholders have set for themselves. Another positive outcome is that the WCEL and Western Washington University have now formed a closer tie to one another.

## Youth Engagement Project

Mary Haycox and Derik Dunning, two graduate students, combined PAR efforts in working with youth 12 to 20 years old in Whatcom County. The core stakeholder groups which included Northwest Youth Services, Whatcom County Juvenile Justice Services, Whatcom County Dispute Resolution Services, Whatcom County Commission on Children and Youth, Workforce Development Council, Whatcom County Readiness to Learn Consortium, and Whatcom Coalition for Healthy Communities, wanted to find out from youth what their experience is in living in Whatcom County. Focus groups of youth were asked questions such as:

1. Do you feel safe?
2. Where do you hang out?
3. What do you think about the school system?
4. What do you think about the law enforcement?
5. What could be better?

Through focus groups and photo elicitation, 19 youth responded to the questions and formulated some of their own. Some key findings included an acknowledgement that there is a good supply of part-time minimum wage work but a severe need for greater opportunities for living wage employment, reports of widespread use of drugs among youth, the need for a community center for youth, a lack of awareness of youth programming in the community, a general sense of safety, and a feeling that adults in the community didn't take youth seriously. Data from the PAR project will be added to data gathered by other project participants to contribute to the development of consensus standards to guide community collaboration and impact policy. The PAR project paves the way for a peer-driven "youth-mapping" project that can capture more perspectives of Whatcom youth and it facilitates ways for youth to have a stronger voice in the community.

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