Course Goals and Overview

The specific course goals that centered on students' acquisition of skills and knowledge of PAR processes involved the following:

1. Learning about issues identified by members of a particular community group/agency
2. Acquiring PAR skills
3. Utilizing PAR skills through participation in a PAR project
4. Learning the historical and theoretical underpinnings of PAR
5. Reflecting on the ethical, theoretical and pragmatic aspects of using PAR
6. Considering uses of PAR understanding and skills for a student's involvement in future projects

Achievement of course goals was to be demonstrated by students through the following:

1. The creation of a portfolio
2. Participation in activities in class
3. Discussion of topics based on close, critical readings of assigned materials
4. Presentations made in class and to the community partners
5. Planning and participating in a culminating celebration with community members
6. Creating self-evaluations and evaluations for community partners to complete about the student's involvement in the project
7. Check-in writes
8. Evaluations from community partners

Students who enrolled in the PAR class were engaged in a variety of activities both within the classroom and in the community. In the classroom setting, students learned about PAR as a method for researching, analyzing, and using findings to directly benefit members of a community. Through readings, discussion, films, and exercises (see Resources), students learned how to cooperatively develop research questions and how to facilitate and record important information shared at community meetings. They practiced cooperative research skills that could be introduced to community stakeholders and used in their groups' projects. They studied different methods to collectively analyze findings and assess group research approaches. They practiced presentations of research results to refine the presentations they gave to community members at the end of the quarter.

All students had a main contact person, a member of the core stakeholder group, who served as a primary mentor and teacher for the student in the community. Members of the core stakeholder group, that group of community partners who were most directly involved in the research process, served as community teachers for the students and mentored them in their endeavors as co-researchers. In reciprocal fashion, these core stakeholders benefited from the knowledge captured in the action research process and, most significantly, through the new relationships created between stakeholders and those who use their services. Each learned more about the other and gained a more mutual understanding of each other's interests and capacities.

At the end of the quarter, students gave presentations in class, outlining their group's project goals, research findings, and plans for future actions. They also made presentations to their core stakeholder groups. A Portfolio of the community-based project was compiled by each student. Drawing upon suggestions from the instructors, classmates, and community partners, students crafted a final version of their portfolios to present to community partners.

To celebrate the collaborative work of students with community partners, the class planned a community celebration of their joint achievements. In addition to engaging in a PAR activity of drawing a community map that showed various organizations' connections with one another (an activity much like one the students engaged in during the course's preliminary workshop), students and community partners alike took turns reflecting on what working together on a PAR project had meant to them.

The experience of working in conjunction with a local community group on a PAR project allowed students to add many skills to their repertoire of participatory action research strategies. PAR equips students with practical solutions and strategies to extend "best practices" in a wide variety of fields. PAR has been used in many international, national and local initiatives, including, but not limited to, immigrant and refugee situations, healthcare, community development and education.