

This article was downloaded by: [VUL Vanderbilt University]

On: 21 November 2011, At: 12:09

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954

Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Journal of Prevention & Intervention in the Community

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/wpic20>

Research, Teaching, and Service in Applied, Multidisciplinary Academic Programs and in Community Organizations

Douglas D. Perkins ^a

^a University of Utah, USA

Available online: 12 Oct 2008

To cite this article: Douglas D. Perkins (2000): Research, Teaching, and Service in Applied, Multidisciplinary Academic Programs and in Community Organizations, Journal of Prevention & Intervention in the Community, 19:2, 121-128

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J005v19n02_17

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae, and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable

for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand, or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

Research, Teaching, and Service in Applied, Multidisciplinary Academic Programs and in Community Organizations

Douglas D. Perkins

University of Utah

SUMMARY. The present paper describes a possible career path to research, teaching, and service in interdisciplinary academic departments (e.g., criminal justice and family and social policy/human and community development). Such employment has become an increasingly viable and interesting career route, given the increase in multidisciplinary applied social science programs and the limited availability of academic jobs in psychology departments, especially for non-clinical and non-experimental psychologists. Professional consultations to local government (e.g., housing, planning, and police departments) and non-profit organizations (community voluntary associations and lobby/technical assistance organizations) are also common in this career path. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-342-9678. E-mail address: getinfo@haworthpressinc.com <Website: <http://www.haworthpressinc.com>>]*

KEYWORDS. Community psychology, multidisciplinary

Address correspondence to: Douglas D. Perkins, Environment & Behavior Area, FCS Department/AEB, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, UT 84112 (email: Perkins@FCS.Utah.edu).

[Haworth co-indexing entry note]: "Research, Teaching, and Service in Applied, Multidisciplinary Academic Programs and in Community Organizations." Perkins, Douglas D. Co-published simultaneously in *Journal of Prevention & Intervention in the Community* (The Haworth Press, Inc.) Vol. 19, No. 2, 2000, pp. 121-128; and: *Employment in Community Psychology: The Diversity of Opportunity* (ed: Clifford R. O'Donnell, and Joseph R. Ferrari) The Haworth Press, Inc., 2000, pp. 121-128. Single or multiple copies of this article are available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service [1-800-342-9678, 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. (EST). E-mail address: getinfo@haworthpressinc.com].

© 2000 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.

121

To understand, or at least not be surprised at, the number of community psychologists working in nontraditional settings (i.e., outside psychology departments and clinics), one need only seek in vain for community psychology in the contents of most introductory psychology texts. These (no doubt unavoidable) defections from psychology may be interpreted as a proselytizing strength of community psychology. This article describes some of the personal experiences that have fostered my optimism about the employment picture in community research and action and about its current and potential impact. Ironically, that impact may be more on the broader profession of psychology (e.g., the American Psychological Association's recent emphases of urban community problems and prevention) and on multidisciplinary fields of research and intervention than on academic psychology departments which house most of the programs in community psychology.

I have worked as a faculty member in interdisciplinary programs in criminal justice and, for the past nine years, in environment and behavior and family and consumer studies. These experiences have affirmed the explicitly ecological, political, and applied philosophy of science of my training as a community psychologist. That training (at New York University) involved an ecological/systemic (and explicitly non-clinical) approach to community-based theory, research, and action in mental health and social change. Ecological theory and research means analyzing the community social, political, economic, and physical environment of psychosocial problems. Systemic action implies the solution or prevention of those problems at the programmatic or policy, as opposed to individual treatment, level. What field could be more naturally interdisciplinary?

RESEARCH

Most of my research interests lie in three areas: (1) processes of community social and environmental change via citizen participation in block and neighborhood organizations, (2) the impact of crime and social and environmental disorder on individuals and communities, and (3) the role of social research in societal change. Related topics include methods of analyzing the social and physical environment of neighborhoods, research dissemination and application, strategies of individual, organizational, and community empowerment, and neighborhood issues, such as housing (affordability, deterioration, revival-

ization, preservation), land use, environmental hazards, crime, delinquency, and substance abuse. Settings include homes, residential street-blocks, community voluntary associations, neighborhoods, human service agencies, and policy-making jurisdictions. These complex, “real-world” issues and settings require an ecological research orientation, careful attention to multiple levels of analysis, and, ideally, multiple methods of data collection: in my case, telephone surveys and qualitative, in-depth interviews, physical environmental assessment, use of both quantitative and qualitative archives (crime records, census data, content analysis of newspaper articles), and program evaluation techniques. Indeed, to really understand these topics and methods, one must become interdisciplinary, at least in terms of reading the literature in many fields (community, social, developmental, and environmental psychology, sociology and demography, political science, economics, geography, urban affairs and planning, law, criminology, community organizing and development). Keeping up with other disciplines is, of course, easier in a multidisciplinary department.

TEACHING

I have taught the following courses at the University of Utah (descriptions on Worldwide Web at www.fcs.utah.edu/fcs/perkinsd.html): Social Research Methods, Community Environments, Community Psychology, Community and Environmental Change, Graduate Thesis Development Seminar, Capstone in Service-Learning (to allow students to conduct their own evaluation, need assessment, or other follow-up project in a setting where they have volunteered), Social Scientists and Social Policy, Community Service and the Needs of Children. Before coming to Utah, as a visiting professor at Temple University’s Department of Criminal Justice, I taught: Community Crime Prevention, Environmental Criminology, Planned Organizational and Community Change, Urban Crime Patterns, Research Methods in Criminal Justice, and Introduction to Criminal Justice. Almost *all* of the above courses in both programs are very multidisciplinary. In fact, the only course I have ever taught (at Utah and as a graduate student at New York University) that is at all *intradisciplinary* is Community Psychology.

SERVICE AND “SERVICE LEARNING”

Service learning (SL), a significant and growing movement in secondary and higher education, is “a method under which students . . .

learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service that: is conducted in and meets the needs of a community and is coordinated with . . . the community; helps foster civic responsibility; is integrated into and enhances the academic curriculum of the students . . . ; and includes structured time for the students and participants to reflect on the service experience” (National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993). SL students learn practical skills and information, greater political awareness, and a more developed sense of communitarianism. It adds reality and relevance to the curriculum by bringing to life dry classroom materials, by showing how social processes really work (and often do not work as planned) in the unpredictable and complex world of realpolitik, and by giving students skills, experience, and connections that often lead to employment opportunities. (There is an SL listserv for students, faculty, SL coordinators, and job-seekers (see website: [://csf.colorado.EDU:80/sl/main.html](mailto://csf.colorado.EDU:80/sl/main.html)). The National Service-Learning Cooperative Clearinghouse (ERIC) website is at www.nicl.coled.umn.edu. The campus Outreach Opportunity League website is at www.COOL2SERVE.org. The International Partnership for Service-Learning is at www.studyabroad.com/psl.)

I have incorporated service learning into almost all the courses I have taught at Utah. About a thousand undergraduates and ten graduate students have helped plan, conduct, and report on my various community service/research projects, which have provided useful information to a wide variety of public and private organizations (community councils, Neighborhood Housing Services, Community Services Council, an ecumenical religious service and advocacy anti-poverty organization, and the SLC Council, Office of Housing and Development, RDA, Planning and Police Departments, and Multi-Ethnic Advisory Committee) with whom the students worked. The projects also had a clearly positive and lasting impact on the students’ learning, as evidenced by their application of ideas and observations from the project to later course work and by their anonymous comments on course evaluations.

A PATH TO INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH, TEACHING, AND SERVICE

The most effective strategy for both distinguishing oneself as a student and getting a “foot in the door” for a job is to volunteer to

assist on faculty or off-campus research projects. For example, while a student at Swarthmore College in 1978, I contacted the Research and Evaluation Department at Hahnemann (now JFK) Mental Health Center in Philadelphia and offered to do a study of the impact of father absence on an inner-city adolescent clinical population. This led to my undergraduate thesis, supervised by Kenneth Gergen, on prevention as social policy. After college, while working as a residential psychiatric counselor I did my own independent research on learned helplessness and attributional style among delinquent and mentally ill adolescents.

After discovering the limitations inherent in individual-level, medical-model interventions to solve problems that are as environmental, institutional, legal, and political as they are psychological, my career interests shifted accordingly. I enrolled in the doctoral program in community psychology at New York University instead of a clinical or even clinical-community program. This shift in orientation is also evidenced in my master's thesis project (under Marybeth Shinn) evaluating an elementary school interpersonal problem-solving primary prevention program, taking elective courses in sociology and the law, and my article on the role for community psychologists in public interest litigation (Perkins, 1988).

RESEARCH ON PRACTICAL COMMUNITY PROBLEMS AND RESPONSES

In 1984, I met David Chavis at the first Northeast Community Psychology conference at NYU and mentioned that my tentative dissertation topic was on community crime prevention. He explained that he, Paul Florin, Richard Rich, and Abraham Wandersman were planning a Ford Foundation project on the role of block associations in community development and crime control. I volunteered to spearhead the collection of environmental and crime data for that project in exchange for access to all project data for my dissertation. (I even wrote a contract signed by the Principal Investigators and myself and delineating responsibilities and authorship arrangements, which I would encourage all student-faculty research teams to do.) This soon led to a paid position for me as a research associate with the Citizens Committee for New York City, which administered the Ford grant (see Perkins & Wandersman, 1990).

Around that time, I independently wrote two small grant proposals (to the National Institute of Justice and Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues) to fund my dissertation on “The Social and Physical Environment of Residential Blocks, Crime and Citizens’ Participation in Block Associations” (Shinn and Barbara Felton, advisors). Both grants were funded and my thesis won the 1991 Dissertation Award of APA Division 27: the Society for Community Research and Action. That work led to several articles (Perkins et al., 1990; Perkins et al., 1993; Perkins, Brown & Taylor, 1996) and many conference papers.

In developing the Block Environmental Inventory, a new instrument to measure the crime-related physical environment of streetblocks, for my dissertation, I sought the advice of Ralph Taylor in the Criminal Justice Department at Temple University. This turned out to be an inadvertently good career move. The following year, Taylor hired me to direct a National Institute of Mental Health study of stress and coping with urban crime and fear. That job gave me valuable skills and experience in planning and managing a large, multi-method research project, including training and supervising research assistants. I co-authored the voluminous Final Report to NIMH and several articles and conference papers on fear of crime, the physical environment of urban neighborhoods, and citizen participation in community organizations (Perkins, Meeks & Taylor, 1992; Taylor et al., 1995; Perkins & Taylor, 1996; Perkins et al., 1996). That experience made me much more marketable as both an academic and an applied researcher.

That project lasted three years, but only funded a Director for one year. So a year into the project, I started my first full-time teaching job as a Visiting Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice for two years. Although this allowed me to hone my teaching skills, learn some interesting, but unfamiliar subjects, and continue work on both the NIMH project and my doctoral dissertation, it also gave me much more empathy for those forced to work two or more (in my case, essentially three full-time) jobs. Like other adults, most graduate students have bills to pay. So I fell into the common pitfall of not finishing my dissertation *before* moving on to a new job and research project, which is my only caution and regret about that experience. It took an intensive effort to simultaneously finish the dissertation and NIMH project and teach four courses per semester. But doing so helped me find the perfect person-environment fit: a tenure-track job as a community and environmental

psychologist in a multidisciplinary, applied research-oriented program in a good institution and high quality-of-life setting.

POLICY RESEARCH

Policy research has long provided employment opportunities for community psychologists. My policy-related research and consulting has been in the areas of community development and housing and crime, delinquency, and drug abuse prevention at the local level. After studying community crime prevention strategies in New York City and Philadelphia, I have consulted with police departments on community-oriented policing practices. I also helped write grant proposals to the National Institute of Justice and the Office of Substance Abuse Prevention (OSAP) for the Eisenhower Foundation for the Prevention of Violence. In 1989, I authored an Eisenhower Foundation report reviewing its national Neighborhood Program Evaluation Conference, which critically analyzed community program evaluation research procedures. Since coming to Utah, I have conducted a variety of applied research projects, including (with Barbara Brown) a longitudinal study to evaluate a multi-million-dollar HUD/Salt Lake City community revitalization project in two working-class neighborhoods (Perkins et al., 1996). I have also consulted on two national OSAP evaluation proposals and the evaluation of the Salt Lake Valley Drug Abuse Prevention Coalition Community Partnership. All of these experiences, from my undergraduate days on, have allowed me to move freely between academia and the world of policy and practice.

CONCLUSIONS

Academia tends to consider research, teaching, and service to be separate domains, but this is misleading for most community psychologists. What is perhaps unusual about academic community psychology is the degree to which *research, teaching, and community service work are inextricably intertwined*. For most academics, service consists of committee work in their department, university, and professional organization and it is an insignificant part of their duties and criteria for tenure and promotion. Community service is viewed at best as a public relations opportunity for the institution and at worst as a distraction from the primary purposes of academia: research first and teaching second.

But as a community psychologist, volunteering for program and policy planning or evaluation, or simply going to talk to community groups and policy-makers has been essential to my training, professional role, and social, political, and moral philosophy. This has led me to be involved in many class and independent projects that are primarily program evaluations, organization development surveys, or community need assessments. Most of these do not lead easily to journal publications. Although there are service and important teaching aspects of these projects, however, they are still valuable *research* studies for their direct utility to the organizations involved and for the theoretical and practical (e.g., data access) groundwork laid for future research. Although community service and service learning can be time consuming, they not only benefit my department and institution in their relations with the community, they are also of tremendous help to my research and teaching and to many of my students who, like me, have launched their own careers through such projects. Interdisciplinary programs seem to appreciate and reward this more than psychology departments, it's sad but not surprising to say, even those with community programs.

REFERENCES

- Perkins, D.D. (1988). The use of social science in public interest litigation: A role for community psychologists. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *16*, 465-485.
- Perkins, D.D., Brown, B.B., & Taylor, R.B. (1996). The ecology of empowerment: Predicting participation in community organizations. *Journal of Social Issues*, *52*, 85-110.
- Perkins, D.D., Florin, P., Rich, R.C., Wandersman, A. & Chavis, D.M. (1990). Participation and the social and physical environment of residential blocks: Crime and community context. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *17*, 83-115.
- Perkins, D.D., Meeks, J.W., & Taylor, R.B. (1992). The physical environment of street blocks and resident perceptions of crime and disorder: Implications for theory and measurement. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, *12*, 21-34.
- Perkins, D.D., & Taylor, R.B. (1996). Ecological assessments of community disorder: Their relationship to fear of crime and theoretical implications. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *24*, 63-107.
- Perkins, D.D., & Wandersman, A. (1990). "You'll have to work to overcome our suspicions:" Benefits and pitfalls of research with community organizations. *Social Policy*, *21* (1), 32-41.
- Perkins, D.D., Wandersman, A., Rich, R.C., & Taylor, R.B. (1993). The physical environment of street crime: Defensible space, territoriality and incivilities. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, *13*, 29-49.
- Taylor, R.B., Koons, B.A., Kurtz, E.M., Greene, J.R., & Perkins, D.D. (1995). Street blocks with more nonresidential land use have more physical deterioration: Evidence from Baltimore and Philadelphia. *Urban Affairs Review*, *31*, 120-136.