

## SOAR Proposal for Summer Research 2017

**Project Title:** Assessing and intervening in health harming legal needs in the Lehigh Valley

**Faculty Mentor:** James Teufel, MPH, PhD, Director of Public Health

**Students:** Beth Davies, Health Science Major (OT Track), Class of 2018

Aaron Hudson, Public Health Major, Class of 2018

**Project Duration:** May 30<sup>th</sup>- August 4<sup>th</sup> (10 weeks)

### **Project description:**

**Background:** The majority of population health in the United States is determined by socioeconomic status (education, income, occupation, community safety, and social networks), physical environments (quality of housing, transportation, and sanitation), working environment, and access to food and healthcare. Civil laws and their enforcement enable people to gain access to food assistance (e.g., SNAP), supplemental income (e.g., SSI and TANF), medical payer sources (e.g., Medicaid and Medicare), educational and disability supports (e.g., IEPs and 504 plans), and family law services (e.g., divorce, child support, guardianship, and adoption). Civil law practice also protects people from violence (e.g., orders of protection), unfair consumer practices (e.g., predatory lending and disallowed debt collection practices). Although they are not medical providers, civil legal aid attorneys are key health care providers in the United States. Civil legal aid attorneys provide law services to people within 200% of the federal poverty level. To maintain service efficiency and effectiveness, civil legal aid requires ongoing assessment of priority population needs to secure funding and tailor services. Previous research supports that a typical low income individual has two current unmet civil legal needs and most of those needs are health harming. Due to no right to counsel for civil law cases in the United States, 80% of civil legal issues go unresolved, and civil legal aid helps to bridge this gap via provision of counsel to low income individuals and households. Based on the World Justice Project's 2016 Rule of Law Index, access and affordability is the area of justice in which the United States has the largest room for improvement (tied for 94th out of 113 countries).

**Proposed project:** Two SOAR students will assess health harming legal needs in the Lehigh Valley. North Penn Legal Services has agreed to partner on the project.

Students will evaluate: 1) health-harming legal needs of participants of the Neighborhood Health Centers of the Lehigh Valley (the local Federally Qualified Health Center) as well as similar clinics of the Lehigh Valley Health Networks or St. Luke's University Health Network and 2) the perceived impacts and aims of clients served by the Medical-Legal Partnership of the Lehigh Valley (a partnership between Lehigh Valley Health Network and North Penn Legal Services) and North Penn Legal Services in Bethlehem. To evaluate the health-harming legal needs, students will conduct surveys or structured interviews in the community. Students will also review screening instruments of North Penn Legal Services to make recommendations for a brief structured goal attainment scaling procedure after

completing formative research with clients. Students will create at least three deliverables. First, they will create a report of priority population legal needs, which is based on collected data and will supplement reports to the United States Legal Services Corporation. Second, a report will be created that will include a structured goal attainment scaling procedure for inclusion in client intakes (beyond the resolution of the direct legal need, what do legal aid clients value with regard to seeking and receiving legal services?). Third, students will ensure that all instrumentation and measurement procedures are written in English and Spanish. Fourth, SOAR students will write protocols for subsequent students (e.g., interns or volunteers) to follow to collect legal needs data in health clinic settings.

**Rationale:** Civil legal aid access and availability is the greatest justice challenge in the United States. Civil law practice also holds promise to impact population health in the United States; an area where the United States under-performs due to social and civil service underinvestment. This project will contribute to both the Lehigh Valley civil law community (i.e., civil legal aid services and vulnerable populations living in or around the federal poverty line) as well as student skills. Students will develop skills in community engaged research, surveying/interviewing, instrument development, data analysis (using SPSS), and reporting results to stakeholders.

**Qualifications of the students:**

The students selected for this research project were selected in part as a result of both students approaching the faculty mentor regarding a community-based research project. Completing research in community settings with vulnerable populations requires that students have leadership, social, and communication skills. Both students display engagement, courage, and confidence in speaking in the classroom and are also leaders within their respective sports on campus. To complete this research students will need to be able to successfully navigate social networks and organizational structures. The students will also need to work as a team for which they are skilled and complement one another. Beth, for example, is more organized and detail oriented, whereas Aaron is more socially intuitive and an analytic systems thinker. Aaron was by far my most impressive student enrolled in my epidemiology course in the Fall semester. He effortlessly solved analytic problems related to disease distribution and determination that would challenge many graduate students.

**Student Roles and Engagement in Discipline-Appropriate Scholarly Research:** Under mentor guidance student's responsibilities for this project would include community engagement, instrument development, data collection, data analysis, data reporting, making recommendation, and developing replication toolkits. This research will support the sustainability and dissemination of civil legal aid as a method to address population health in the Lehigh Valley.

**Role of the faculty mentor:** The faculty mentor is a nationally and internationally recognized scholar in the area of the intersection of civil legal aid and health and creating business cases to sustain innovative approaches to address the social

determinants of health. The mentor will offer guidance to student research and develop organizational partnerships.

**Expected Timeline of Project:**

**Weeks 1-2:** Create survey and interview questions that will be asked to the clientele at the various facilities. Ensure translation of materials into Spanish.

**Weeks 3-7:** Conduct surveys and interviews at the numerous locations in the Lehigh Valley to assess the legal needs of vulnerable populations and the goals/aims of those seeking legal aid services in the Lehigh Valley.

**Weeks 8-10:** Analyze the data that was collected through the partnerships with health clinics and North Penn Legal Services. Develop/finalize reports, recommendations, and replication toolkits.

**Student Justification:**

I am particularly excited to work with Aaron Hudson on this summer research project. Aaron is a rising scholar in the public health program. In the year since I met him, he has emerged as a leader in and out of the classroom. He participates in class discussions on a regular basis and acts as a leader in the classroom. He also recently became one of the founding members of the new, as of Spring 2017, Public Health Club on campus. I believe that Aaron was trying to find his academic niche, and I believe that he has found it in public health. I can foresee him pursuing a Master's Degree in Public Health with a focus in clinical epidemiology (study of the distribution and determinants of disease in healthcare settings) and/or public health management (e.g., emergency response and preparedness or health security). His social and leadership skills as well as his ability to perform well in stressful situations will help him in his future as well as this project. In real time (classroom discussion) contexts, he also outperformed all students in my epidemiology course, which requires analytic systems thinking.

**Reasoning for Multiple Students Required:** Two students are needed to complete this project due to the scope of the work proposed in the project. Based on prior similar research conducted by colleagues in Delaware, two students with a full-time commitment to the project would meet the minimum effort expectations to complete the proposed project successfully. Including two students enables simultaneous data collection at multiple data collection sites, which will be necessary to collect generalizable data ( $N > 400$ ), and create expected deliverables.

**Student Benefits:** Students will learn about the health-harming legal needs in the Lehigh Valley and develop reports and recommendations that will improve intervening in these justice needs. They will also improve interview capabilities and learn how to properly administer surveys to collect data. After the data is collected and evaluated, students will be engaged in analyzing the information through SPSS. After analysis, students will learn how to write meaningful reports for stakeholders and scholars (utility-focused evaluation). This work can also be presented at state and national conferences and summits (e.g., Annual National Medical-Legal Partnership Summit).

## **SOAR Project Proposal** **Summer 2017**

### **Student Statement of Purpose**

**Project Title:** Assessing and intervening in health harming legal needs in the Lehigh Valley

**Student Name:** Beth Davies

**Major:** Health Sciences: OT track

**Graduation:** May 2018

**Faculty Mentor:** Dr. Teufel, Professor, Department of Public Health

**Campus Housing:** Yes

This year has been quite interesting for me to say the least. I started Moravian College thinking that I was going to graduate with my Nursing degree. I have always been one to care and work hard for my education. During the Spring of 2017, I met some wonderful people in the Public Health and Health Science Department, which has helped me to decide on my future.

Over the past few weeks, I have been fortunate enough to take one of Dr. Teufel's classes that covered the topic of homelessness, which has always been something that I was moved by. I assisted in the Point-in-Time Survey for Homelessness this semester in the Lehigh Valley, which is something that takes place once a year. This survey requires people to go out into the community and count the homeless individuals on the streets, which in the end determines if the area is in need of more funding. Personally homelessness and those struggling daily breaks my heart, and I would love to do anything in my power that can assist those that are in desperate need. This past Spring break I spent my time doing many things that can benefit our homeless and less fortunate families within our area. For example, making scarves and blankets, organizing a clothing closet that provides free clothes to people in need as well as assisting New Bethany Ministries with their food pantry.

I know that this project is specific to the issues of civil legal aid that individuals experience, but I'm curious to see how much civil legal aid helps individuals within our community and what those are specifically using the aid for. Most importantly I am eager to learn if legal aid services can better address needs that aren't being met.

From this project I expect to learn about the key services that Lehigh Valley Health Network, Medical-Legal Partnerships and North Penn Legal Services do for those less fortunate within our community as well as what people like me can do to assist them with to help get people off the streets or into better living conditions that can increase their overall health and life.

## SOAR Project Proposal Summer 2017

### **Student Statement of Purpose**

**Project Title:** Assessing and intervening in health harming legal needs in the Lehigh Valley

**Student Name:** Aaron Hudson

**Major:** Public Health with a focus in Clinical Epidemiology

**Graduation:** May 2018

**Faculty Mentor:** Dr. Teufel, Professor, Department of Public Health

**Campus Housing:** Yes

Upon my arrival at Moravian College I always knew two things about the career path I wanted to follow. The first was I wanted a job that would allow me to help individuals and provide a service that would benefit the community around me. Second, was I knew I wanted to have a job that involved something with health. At first I thought pursuing a career as a physical therapist was a no brainer, I would be able to help people that had been injured and my job would be to aid in their recovery process as they slowly returned to the active lifestyle. However, after this past fall semester, it was apparent that this was simply not the right career path for me. When I was faced with this daunting decision I was fortunate enough to have already met Dr. James Teufel. When I told him I was thinking about changing my major he recommended that I think about following a public health major. After researching the different career opportunities that would be possible I found a new passion in my academics. Not only was I interested and intrigued by this type of work, but it would allow me to benefit those around me in a more impactful manor while staying with a health major.

I am currently a junior at Moravian College, and I would love to have the opportunity to be a part of a SOAR program. I recognize one obstacle to be a part of this summer internship. Unfortunately, I do not currently meet the 3.0 GPA requirement. In the past, I would not have even applied for this internship opportunity, but I feel that my situation has changed for the better. I admit that in my earlier days at the college that I was not necessarily an exemplary student and may have allowed my focus on athletic to overshadow the importance of my academics. I am currently trying correct all of the mistakes I have made in previous years. On that note, students who make this same type of mistake have two avenues they can follow which is to stay in rut they are currently in or work to get out this rut and begin to better themselves. I feel that since changing my major to Public Health, not only have I made adequate strides to doing so but also I have found a true passion with this type of work. Since changing my major the first major change has been in my grades, looking at my current grades I would say there has been a tremendous increase from this same point last semester. Second is that I have not only joined a club but have helped start one. I currently hold the title of the treasurer for the newly formed Public Health Club. Lastly I have worked with Dean Hunt and have become more involved with the Black Student Union in different ways to improve not only myself but also trying to find different ways to recruit new members into the club.

By doing this Dean Hunt and I had the intention of finding young students that have potential but just need to have a positive role model that would be willing to course correct younger students that are beginning to lose focus on their academics. I did all of this while staying on the football team and taking on a tremendous role as I was named captain of the team. I feel that this shows I am willing to take on more responsibility and am trying to make strides to have a positive impact on the Moravian College campus as well. While on the right path I still feel that I need to keep finding different opportunities that are presented to me in order to become a model student.

This SOAR project would also be a huge step in the right direction for my future career aspirations as well as getting into a graduate program. Not only will I be able to gain great work experience in the field I am thinking of pursuing, but Beth and I will ultimately be able to be able to learn about the health-harming legal needs in the Lehigh Valley by specifically studying the services provided by both the Lehigh Valley Health Network and North Penn Legal Services in order to improve the situations of vulnerable people in the Lehigh Valley community. Additionally we will be able to improve abilities such as data collection and analysis, interviewing skills, and the interpretation and scholarly writing about information collected.

By accepting me into this program I know that it would go against the normal protocol, but I feel that there is a lot to gain from it as well. It would go along with the theme of this study, which is addressing inequality and helping those in need. I understand that I have not been perfect up to this point, but should an individual always be judged on their mistakes made in the past, or judged by the actions they are taking in order to correct those mistakes? An acceptance into this program could tremendously benefit an individual such as myself. My grades are steadily improving, and I am becoming more involved within the college. Ultimately this research could potentially become a part of the curriculum of Moravian College for students who are choosing to go into the public health major, and information could be presented on a national level and could possibly lead to advancements in the field of public health and the Lehigh Valley community.

**SOAR Project Proposal**  
**Summer 2017**

**Expense Proposal**

**Project Title:** Assessing and intervening in health harming legal needs in the Lehigh Valley

**Student Name:** Aaron Hudson & Beth Davies

**Major:** Public Health with a focus in Clinical Epidemiology and Health Sciences OT

**Graduation:** May 2018

**Faculty Mentor:** Dr. Teufel, Professor, Department of Public Health

**Expected Expenses:**

**Mileage for Data Collection and Community Meetings:**

Up to 400 mile travel reimbursement @ federal mileage rate of 0.535 per mile per student= \$214 per student\*

**Total expense request: \$428**

\*Each student would submit for mileage reimbursement by the end of week 9 of the project. Mileage logs would justify mileage reimbursement requests and would not exceed \$214 per student.