

Extending ACT's Reach: Building Leadership for Community Development Improvement

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Mission To inspire and equip university students to lead social change for community improvement.

The Community Action Research Experiences (CARE) program is a year long experience in which undergraduate juniors and seniors, and graduate students, collaborate with a community human services organization, whose mission they are passionate about, to complete a project that increases that organization's effectiveness. Typical projects include needs assessments, program evaluations, and community scans.

Program Timeline and Structure

March - Student Selection: The CARE coordinator advertises the opportunity and eligibility and interviews and selects about 15 applicants.

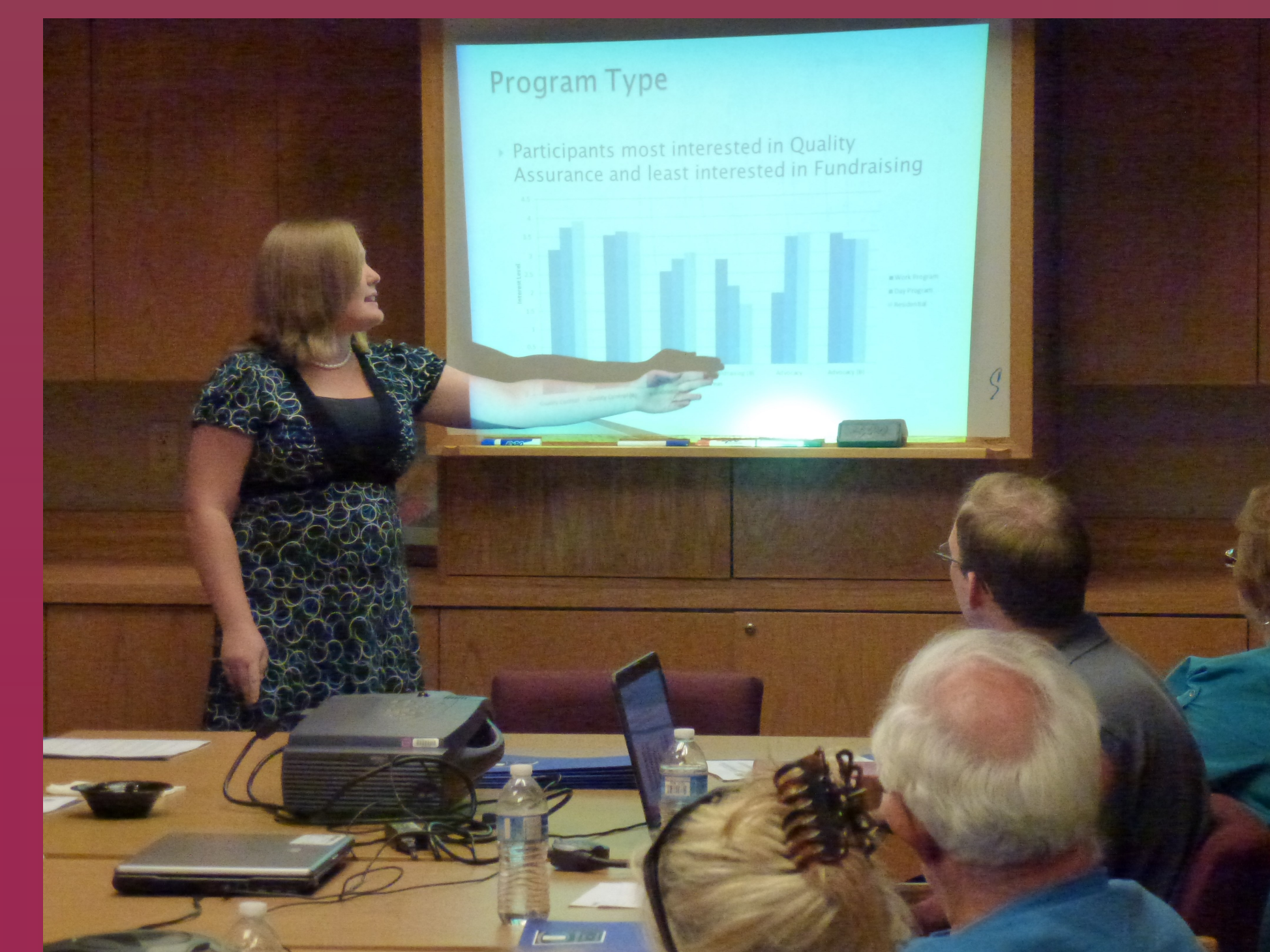


April - Pre-CARE Orientation Workshop: Addresses: what is action research? the program timeline; what is your passion? examples of typical projects; criteria for effective collaboration with a community organization; how to identify and make a pitch to community organizations; forming accountability teams.

May/June/July: Students make pitches to community organizations, solicit several proposals for possible projects, and consult with the coordinator to make their selection.

August to December—CARE 1 (class meets 3 hours/week): Students convene a meeting with the coordinator, thesis advisor, and community organization liaison to agree on scope of the project, develop ACT skills for leadership, write a formal project proposal, obtain approval of project from Institutional Review Board, learn leadership principles to impact social systems, learn basics of action research methods (needs assessment, program evaluation, community scans), and initiate data collection.

January to May—CARE 2: (class meets for 2 hours every second week). Students devote 150 hours to complete data collection, analyze data, develop implications for action, prepare and peer review a professional report of their results, practice and then deliver a presentation of their results and implications to their community organization.



Community Development

Students increase their psychological flexibility as they address the novel and ambiguous leadership challenges of developing a proposal collaboratively, implementing their action research project, and impacting their community organization. Many students use their CARE project as the basis for their honors or master's thesis and go on to integrate community development into their future careers.

Community organizations experience the value of action research to increasing their effectiveness and typically implement results immediately.

Academic units increase their community embeddedness. CARE students must obtain an additional faculty advisor to help guide their project. In the process, faculty advisors gain experience in community action research.