

SCRA Community Psychology Practice Council

Community Psychology Practitioner Profiles Project

Robert V. Heckel, Ph.D.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Job Title	Distinguished Professor Emeritus in Psychology Director, Psychological Services Center at USC
Workplace	University of South Carolina, Psychological Services Center
Location	Columbia, South Carolina
Email Address	
Website	
Professional Affiliations	SCRA (APA Division 27), Society of Clinical Psychology (APA Division 12) Fulbright Scholar to India 1971 working on community/universities intervention project

Please describe the work you do, for pay, as a community psychologist, including the setting(s) where you work?

I directed a research institute the Social Problems Research Institute for 16 years beginning with a small grant of 50,000, growing to an average of one million per year for much of its life. It served as a practicum site for community students, with 12-14 students holding assistantships working in the areas of community development, desegregation, TRIO programs, and working with schools and government agencies and NGO's. Additionally, I taught courses in community, consultation, group dynamics, and evaluation.

What training/education do you have in community psychology?

Beginning as an undergrad I took extensive training in anthropology and sociology in addition to my psychology courses. This continued in graduate school as well. I was exposed to a number of internationally known scholars/researchers from these fields: Maurice Mook, Luther Bernard, Walther Coutu, and Jesse Bernard. I would have selected those areas for graduate training but found that they were observers rather than activists attempting interventions. I found psychology was interested in behavioral change. That had great appeal. I did bring with me from those courses an understanding that appropriate interventions required thorough knowledge and understanding of peoples and their cultures.

Please describe how your training/education contributed to your work as a community psychologist. What do you view as the most important skills you learned in your training as a community psychologist.

Training in community did not exist when I got my degree in 1955. However there were pockets of intense activity, at UNC with Wil Edgerton and community psychiatrist Bill Hollister, and especially at Michigan with their Social Psychology group that had been influenced by Lewin, and the National Training Laboratory and their focus on community interventions, leadership and group development. I count my experiences at NTL as providing a path and direction supplemented by ongoing research on community interventions that served me well and continue to be part of my professional role despite a somewhat advantage.

What other experiences or training have contributed to or enhanced your ability to work as a community psychologist?

I served on the faculty for 9 of 12 weeklong workshops sponsored by NIMH held each year by the community psychiatry program from UNC. I have also served on numerous intervention programs at USC, most sponsored by grants. Other group experiences were a continuing part of my training and teaching throughout my teaching career.

Are there other ways you use your community psychology background and training, either unpaid or in paid roles other than your primary work?

There have been a number of dissertations in community among the 86 dissertations that I have directed (and continue to be involved with). I have served on a wide variety of community organization's boards and advisory groups. I have been called on as a consultant in helping groups deal with a series of issues, some political but primarily those focused on community growth and development. I have published and presented

several hundreds of articles. I have published 29 (or so) books and monographs most on community subjects (A vita of my work is available.)

What advice might you give to students or people considering community psychology as a career?

Develop an intense curiosity and learn as much as you can about everything. Never think for a moment that you know what is best for others. Ask them. Talk to community activists. Though he is gone, there are still folks like Don Klein who will share their wisdom with you.

Is there anything else you would like to say about your role as a community psychology practitioner?

It has been a great ride. At 86 my interests are still alive and the field has never looked better.