

ATPM Symposium Project Goes National

Research Project Spotlight

As the Board Chair of Health Students Taking Action Together and medical student, Carmen Patrick met hundreds of students involved in the community. Despite the volume and quality of student activity, however, she noticed the body of literature that described this work was scant often leading students to reinvent the wheel and miss important opportunities for learning and collaboration.

In the Summer of 2004, Carmen was challenged by a mentor who asked the following question, “How can professionals who are engaged in their communities improve the intellectual environment of our work?” She began to think about ways that students could connect across geographic and professional boundaries, share best practices and evaluate the work they do. The result is *Context – The Journal of Health Students Taking Action Together in Partnership with the Student Health Alliance*.

With its launch this fall at www.contextjournal.org, *Context* will be the nation’s first student-run, online, peer-reviewed journal that highlights the exceptional work of health students in the community and recognizes insightful, well-designed evaluations of student-initiated programs. *Context* will be published semi-annually and places exceptional work done within

communities on par with scientific excellence just as it connects students across the nation working to improve the health of our communities from a variety of perspectives.

Originally intended as a Georgia-based journal, it quickly became apparent that *Context* might offer enormous possibility to students all over the country. With the help of Arun Mohan, HealthSTAT’s President at the time, Carmen drafted a small proposal for the project which Arun passed along to Chris Day, the Coordinator of the Student Health Alliance, a national alliance with almost 200,000 student members, whom Arun had met three years before at the Paul Ambrose Health Promotion Student Leadership Symposium (PAHPSLS) sponsored by ATPM (an event that Carmen, Arun and Chris all attended albeit in separate years). Chris was immediately enthusiastic about the idea and equated the concept of *Context* to a journal that SHA had agreed to establish. He also saw the value of a partnership, one that connected the local work in which HealthSTAT engages to the national work in which SHA is involved.

Since receiving initial funding of \$200 (PAHPSLS micro-grant) from ATPM, Carmen, now a third-year at Emory University School of Medicine, has gone on to

raise almost \$80,000 for the project including recent multi-year funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. For Carmen, *Context* is based on a simple premise. To maximize students’ contributions to their communities, students need to reflect on their service, communicate the contribution of community experiences to their professional careers, and formulate best practices.

In doing this, *Context* enhances the intellectual environment of the student volunteer community, creates space in the literature for students to reflect on their experiences in communities, increases the sharing of knowledge across geographic and professional boundaries; and develops a pipeline of community-based researchers, peer reviewers, and editors.

Context is currently beginning a national search for editors and peer reviewers with the first issue scheduled to be published in Spring 2005. The journal is looking for graduate-level students of any discipline, but especially those related to the health professions, who are enthusiastic about student-initiated community endeavors. If you or a student you know are interested in more information or in applying for these positions, visit www.contextjournal.org.