

4-9-2014

# Behavioral Activation in a Homeless Shelter: An Example of Engaged Scholarship

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## Recommended Citation

Glending, Zach; Farmer, Christine; Crossman, Jessalyn; DeBellis, Jacob; and Rodriguez, Stephanie, "Behavioral Activation in a Homeless Shelter: An Example of Engaged Scholarship" (2014). *Stander Symposium Posters*. Book 400.

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# Behavioral Activation in a Homeless Shelter: An Example of Engaged Scholarship

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## Introduction and Purpose

This project investigates the use of a Behavioral Activation (BA) program at a men's homeless shelter. BA is "...a therapeutic process that emphasizes structured attempts at engendering increases in overt behaviors that are likely to bring [the person] into contact with reinforcing environmental contingencies and produce corresponding improvements in thoughts, mood, and overall quality of life" (Hopko et al., 2003, p. 700).

The program is guided by the Psycho-Ecological Systems Model for Engaged Scholarship (Reeb & Folger, 2013), and it uses a Participatory Community Action Research Strategy, as well as the pedagogical technique of Service-Learning. Undergraduates work with professors, community partners, and graduate students to implement the project and reflect on social justice issues.

Activities implemented at the shelter include those that enhance:

1. Empowerment (e.g., GED training)
2. Coping (e.g., stress management)
3. Mood, hope, quality of life, and social skills (e.g., recreational events)

## Hypotheses

1. Upon leaving the shelter, rates of positive outcomes (housing retention, employment) will be superior for shelter guests in BA, relative to rates of shelter guests prior to implementation of BA.
2. Among men in BA, short-term gains (e.g., hope, empowerment) will predict the positive outcomes noted above.
3. As BA is implemented over time, perceptions of the shelter's social climate will improve for both guests and staff.
4. Relative to a comparison group, service-learning students will show improvements in civic-related variables and less stigma toward homelessness.

## Plan for Assessing Outcomes

1. After each activity, shelter guests complete the *Activity Evaluation Process Measure*, which assesses their (a) desire engage in the activity again and (b) perceptions regarding the activity's meaningfulness.
2. At baseline and one-month intervals, shelter guests complete the *Psychosocial Process Measure for Homeless Individuals*, which assesses relevant constructs including hope, empowerment, sense of purpose, social stigma concerns, job motivation, and shelter climate.
3. Long-term outcomes on critical variables (housing retention, employment) for participants will be compared to outcomes of clients prior to BA implementation.
4. At pre- and post-semester, students complete measures of civic-related attitudes (e.g., *Community Service Self-Efficacy Scale*) and social stigma measures.