Why should scientists do community-based research?

Addressing the fears of science students interested in community work

**Why engage in community-based research ... and what is it again?**

- In a nutshell, academics and community actors partner up to develop solution plans, and to implement them.
- The goal is to research the application of academic knowledge to solve community problems...while actually solving community problems!
- It works! Take a look at the successful stories in this very room.

**What if I only worked in the lab or with theory?**

- Don’t worry, you possess a lot of knowledge and transferable skills.
- Willingness and enthusiasm are the best background.
- Starting and learning along the way is a successful strategy.
- There is help!

...and I don’t know anything about community development?

- If you live in a community, you surely know something.
- There is help to get you up to speed with any sensitive issue!

**What if I only worked in the lab or with theory?**

- Results of problem-solving work in the community are precious data for applied science.
- …that can also improve science theory.
- Participatory research is already a recognized method in many branches of science and engineering.

**Where do I start?**

- Community-based projects in your department.
- Join the Environmental Liaison Program!
- Engineers Without Borders, Public Service Research Program, Graduate Student Community Service Committee…
- State, national, international programs, e.g. Peace Corps, AmeriCorps.

**Where can this lead me?**

- You’ll be able to carry out participatory research in your academic career.
- You’ll set up service and outreach projects with confidence.
- You’ll know more of the world outside the lab or your computer.
- You’ll be in high demand in non-profits, companies and research institutes interacting with communities.

...so what is your project?

**Show me the action...and what I can learn!**

- Put science in practice and see the results.
- Get real-world feedback on which methods and theories work...or on why they don’t.
- Learn new research methods to apply to your future projects.
- Be part of a cultural exchange network.
- Gain skills in working with people, communication, project management, service, and grow as a person and scholar.

**Yes, but... will it be considered “real” science?**

- Results of problem-solving work in the community are precious data for applied science.
- …that can also improve science theory.
- Participatory research is already a recognized method in many branches of science and engineering.

Elisabetta Lambertini, Civil and Environmental Engineering, UC Davis, elambertini@ucdavis.edu. Thanks to the Environmental Liaison Program team. Background picture by Stacey Ellis.