
Community and Economic Development in North Carolina and Beyond Blog: UNC Partnerships with Tier I Counties (Part VI): Health Care Careers in Eastern, NC

By CED Guest Author

Article: <https://ced.sog.unc.edu/unc-partnerships-with-tier-i-counties-part-vi-health-care-careers-in-eastern-nc/>

This entry was posted on April 19, 2012 and is filed under Community Development, Community-Campus Partnership, Human & Cultural Assets, Lenoir County



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As described in parts I, II, III, IV and V of this series, UNC Chapel Hill faculty, staff and students are engaged in creative partnerships with Tier I counties across North Carolina. This post is the sixth in a series highlighting community and economic development partnerships between Tier I counties and UNC. The purpose of this series is to provide examples of projects, for potential or future community partners, in which UNC resources have been available to assist Tier I counties.

Each semester, faculty in the UNC Department of City and Regional Planning (DCRP) offer workshop courses for graduate students. Workshops involve partnerships between groups of graduate students and outside entities with an interest in a relevant planning topic (including economic and community development). Teams of graduate students provide applied research and consulting services to partners on specific questions of local or regional significance.

Lenoir County:

Recently, Dr. Nichola Lowe delivered a workshop course designed to help a non-profit health care provider, RHA Howell, develop a strategy for enhancing health care career development opportunities in Lenoir County, NC. Like many health care facilities in eastern North Carolina, RHA Howell has long suffered from high employee turnover, especially among its entry-level direct support workforce. To address this problem, the organization developed an innovative internal career ladder program in 2008 to provide financial and case management assistance to entry-level employees seeking to move up to better paying, higher ranking health care occupations.

RHA Howell sought help from UNC in broadening the reach of this program in order to benefit more low-income residents and workers in Lenoir County. Their goal was to establish a region-wide 'career lattice' program that would allow workers to move through various regional health care organizations and in the process secure better advancement opportunities. With this in mind, the workshop class was designed to provide background research to help RHA Howell identify institutional opportunities and challenges to program expansion. As part of this work, students identified potential partners and interviewed them to assess their interest and needs.

Building on findings outlined in a detailed report to RHA Howell, several students from this course continued to work on this issue through summer internships, with assistance from the UNC Community-Campus Partnership. The result was a



series of meetings involving multiple health care providers and educational institutions from eastern North Carolina. These meetings helped to plant the seed for regional career lattice coordination and determined the next set of activities needed to achieve this goal.

Nichola Lowe led the DCRP graduate student workshop with RHA Howell.

*Will Lambe authored the NC Rural Center report, *Small Towns, Big Ideas*, and he served as Director of the Community and Economic Development Program at the School of Government from 2009 to 2014.*