

**Adaptations and Resilience: Great Lakes Native American Research Center for Health Evaluation
Report
2003-2021**

Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council

Lac du Flambeau, WI

CSAC Report: August 31, 2021

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Abstract

The Great Lakes Native American Research Center for Health (GLNARCH) is housed in the Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council (GLITC) central office on the Lac du Flambeau reservation in northern WI. Under the most recent funding cycle the team adapted to the challenges of 2020-21 to support research and training networks with AI/AN groups and institutions in the tristate Bemidji Area of Michigan (MI), Minnesota (MN) and Wisconsin (WI). The recent merge with a previously separate NARCH awardee, Native Environmental Health Research Network (NEHR), has presented novel opportunities to enhance the participation of AI/AN people in biomedical science via tribal college/university (TCU) engagement. This report describes ongoing outcome measures from an established evaluation plan. These data confirm that GLNARCH is meeting educational and health research promotion goals. This assessment aligns with best practices of equity in assessment. Other recent developments include online learning options for the student enhancement component and community surveys to investigate resiliency to health crises in Indian Country. Emphasizing the evolving nature of assessment and promoting a vision of success that responds to the most valued learning goals of our service area remains a priority.

Keywords: community-engaged research, program evaluation, wellness, culture, American Indian/Alaska Native

A Culture and Wellness Pilot to Guide Native American Research Centers for Health

Evaluation

INTRODUCTION

GLNARCH establishes collaborative research, builds capacity, and promotes science important to the Tribes and Urban Indian organizations within the three-state IHS Bemidji Area [3, 5-12]. GLNARCH X has carried the torch under the recent funding cycle 2018-2022. GLNARCH has also succeeded in securing supplemental financial support from partners such as Forest County Potawatomi Tribe and other Tribal sponsors the Wisconsin Partnership Program, University of Wisconsin (UW) School of Nursing, the UW Native American Health Research Program, and Concordia University, to support AI/AN students. Therefore, GLNARCH is a valuable resource for Bemidji region AI/AN communities and the only capacity funding resource for Bemidji TCUs. The GLNARCH program has typically consisted of research/pilot projects, a four-phased student development program, and an administrative component. More recently, the Capacity Component was added as a merger with a previously separate NARCH (NEHR, PI-Dr. Stevens). NARCH centers face multiple challenges that are in many ways unique to the AI/AN context. The unique circumstances of AI/AN health promotion have been discussed by our GLNARCH team (M. Dellinger & Dellinger, 2018; M. J. Dellinger et al., 2016; Jackson et al., 2015) and others extensively (Solomon et al., 2014).

Dr. Dellinger and Ms. Poupart work with Ms. Lemoine and the MCW program coordinator to produce annual assessment reports with recommended updates. Recommendations from the most recent report were used to develop this GLNARCH XII application including the Capacity and Student Enhancement components. These reports are reviewed at CSAC meetings to assure the GLNARCH program is attaining its goals for each component. Student interns also have an opportunity to provide feedback during the CSAC meeting. Recommendations are also solicited from key informants, students, and interviews at the cultural events, focus groups, and site visits.

The following overarching outcomes are addressed in each assessment report to CSAC: (1) Is GLNARCH operating with fidelity? (2) Is GLNARCH fostering partnerships? (3) Are GLNARCH research

activities contributing to health science fields? (4) Is GLNARCH fostering community-based participatory research? (5) Is GLNARCH research serving the community and addressing health disparities? And (6) Are AI/AN students successfully mentored and supported through each phase and progressing through phases? A new metric category is in development for future reports: Do GLNARCH activities promote health and wellness as defined by the culture of the community? The team recently deployed modified survey instrument [1] to investigate GLNARCH impacts on health and wellness at community engagement activities (open houses, powwows, and cultural events). Also, quantitative data entry, including post internship evaluations for students and mentors, has been updated to use REDCap™ as a centralized database.

Table 1: Overview of GLNARCH evaluation and assessment report process (the old and the new)

Components to Assess	Quantitative Evaluation Sources	Qualitative Evaluation Sources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admin Core/Overall Center • Student Enhancement • Pilot Project • Capacity Building • Seed Projects (new) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questionnaires (new on REDCap™) • Student follow-up and tracking by Program Coordinators. • Curricula vita reviews of NEHR partners (new) • Social media tracking/reviews (new) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key informant interviews • Digital storytelling and video production • Community-focused questionnaires (new) • Focus Groups (SCEP)

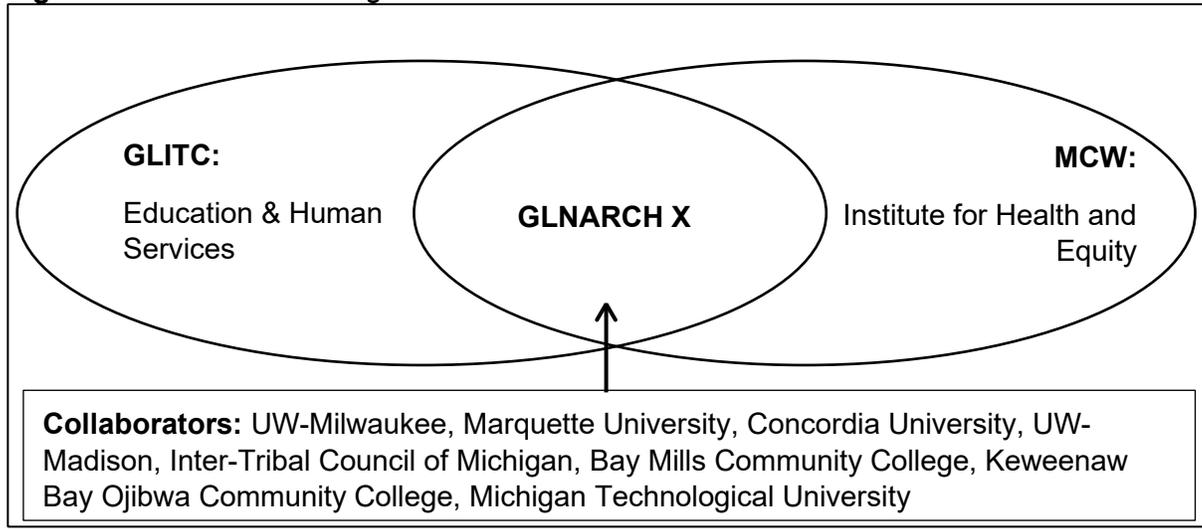
The GLNARCH Model and its Origins

GLNARCH grew from interest in research identified during a strategic planning session held between the Wisconsin Tribal Health Director Association and Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council, Inc. (GLITC) Indian Health Program in fall 1999 (M. J. Dellinger et al., 2016). The current funding is a partnership between GLITC and the Medical College of Wisconsin (MCW).

The center also coordinates with regional partners from both academic and AI/AN institutions.

Figure 1 outlines the key GLNARCH partners and their institutions as of 2019.

Figure 1: Institutional Setting for GLNARCH X



Housed at GLITC, GLNARCH relies on a model of academic and tribal community partnerships that evolved from a combination of leadership from the tribal partners and adherence to community-engaged participatory research principles by the academic partners. The center currently consists of four core components: 1) the administrative core, who oversee the overall center; 2) research projects, conducted by various academic-tribal partnerships in the region; 3) a student career enhancement component, that exposes tribal students to academic opportunities, and 4) a capacity building component, that seeks to extend research opportunities for researchers and trainees engaged in relevant projects. The capacity team also leads an effort to encourage tribal college/universities (TCU) partnerships with all GLNARCH activities.

METHODS

Descriptive statistics are exported to Windows Excel and any necessary analyses are conducted in STATA™ or equivalent software. All qualitative are analyzed by themes. Data analysis will include descriptive statistics, inferential statistics including t-tests when appropriate, and dashboard-style infographics based on the data collected. See individual components for more details on their target outcomes.

Participants and Key Informants

Program evaluation surveys are solicited from participants in all GLNARCH activities. These include students, mentors, collaborating researchers, and meeting attendees. Most participants were AI/AN tribal

member from the Bemidji area, though non-Natives were not excluded. Based on input from tribal partners, it was important to include non-Native spouses or adopted children of tribal members living in tribal communities and those who live and/or work in the Bemidji region. Only those who did not engage in GLNARCH activities within the time frame were excluded. Surveys and Digital Stories were conducted in English since that is an in-common language among AI/AN populations in the region.

Recruitment

Participants in wellness surveys and digital storytelling were identified by participation in other GLNARCH programming, such as interns and mentors in the internship programming of the student career enhancement component of GLNARCH X. GLNARCH-GLITC coordinators conducted site visits to tribes, tribal colleges and universities (TCUs), and tribal health fairs as part of normal GLNARCH activities. This included meetings, booths at events, etc. During this time, subjects were asked to participate in surveys and/or digital storytelling. Individuals were also recruited in person at GLNARCH events. Participants were provided with an information letter about GLNARCH projects and signed a waiver to participate in digital storytelling. Participants were incentivized to complete surveys and interviews with various gift items such as MCW and GLITC water bottles, shirts, or bags.

Survey Development

Mentor and Student evaluations

The student and mentor evaluations are deployed annually to monitor and adapt the program to the student needs. These assessments also determine if the program is achieving its objectives and goals. The evaluation plan includes process and outcome evaluation, using quantitative and qualitative methods and include but are not limited to the following data sources: post evaluations, key informant interviews, and tracking of social media.

The mentors and students also provide written feedback on intern competencies in key areas at the end of each summer. This was previously the primary source of qualitative data to follow GLNARCH progress towards issues of cultural diversity, partnership, fidelity, contribution to the health field and

community engagement. Other metrics from these assessments describe: the quality of training, including supervision, didactics, and role modeling. This documentation shows that the intern has reached an appropriate competency level by the end of participation in the program and demonstrates new skills acquired over the summer.

For the data presented here, student and mentor surveys were administered as paper questionnaires either in-person or via e-mail. GLNARCH staff (housed at GLITC) collected these surveys via personal contact with each mentor and/or student. Starting in 2018, a REDCap™ (Harris et al., 2009) survey data entry tool was created and GLITC staff entered the survey responses into the online database by hand. Survey responses are summarized using descriptive statistics, such as total counts and prevalence of agreement to items, to match important program evaluation themes. Accomplishments of program participants, i.e. academic presentations, publications, abstracts, and reports are also noted cumulatively since 2003. Mentor and intern evaluation data have been compiled in the updated database back to 2014 to match current evaluation formats. Mentor and intern data from before 2014 can be reviewed in previous reports.

Wellness and Culture Survey Development

To explore health and wellness, contextualized to Anishinaabe culture, questions were developed in consultation with members of the GLNARCH team who themselves are Anishinaabe and/or work and live at the Salish Kootenai or Lac du Flambeau reservations (all authors). The survey was developed in iterations, by consulting internal expertise as well as reviewing qualitative insights from GLNARCH digital story interviews. Over the years GLNARCH digital story participants have mentioned about traditional words or phrases to describe wellness. Those insights were used to guide questionnaire development and format. Ten questions concerning wellness and culture used a Likert Scale to rate level of agreement, while one question asked general health status (See Table 2 in Results). In 2021, the survey instrument was updated to include questions about community resilience during the 2020-2021 health crisis. That survey was deployed at the July 2021 Bear River Powwow in Lac du Flambeau, WI.

Human Subjects Protections, Special Considerations

It was possible that some participants might have felt uncomfortable being asked about their health in the context of culture. Interviewers ensured that these key informants understood that answering any question was optional and that their responses might be shared with a larger audience. Participants in digital storytelling could not be de-identified for analysis because they are filmed, and they agreed to that by signing a waiver. All programmatic questionnaire data are de-identified. Digital story interviews were conducted by GLITC staff who work in the community to increase comfort of participants speaking about their wellness in the context of their culture. The questionnaires were also distributed by the GLITC staff during interviews.

RESULTS

Participant Profiles and Questionnaires

GLNARCH AI/AN alumni include *11 PhDs (with 8 in progress), 2 M.D.s (with 2 in progress) and 24 Bachelor's completed (15 in progress) and 6 other degree-holders (JD, DVM, etc.)*. The GLNARCH team has published their progress in community engagement, culturally competent programming, and training in multiple journals and reports [2-11]. Figure 1 summarizes mission-relevant characteristics of recent interns. Many interns are either undergraduate seniors or graduate students covering at least 12 different tribes. Most internships occur in Wisconsin followed by Michigan. More recently, some interns are taking advantage of the virtual (remote) internship options.

Figure 1: *Intern profile dashboard*



Intern Profiles

2014-2020

(N) 17



17

Total No. of Interns

6 years (2014-2020)

Years as an Intern

1 year	10
2 years	5
3 years	2

Academic Status During Internship

Sophomore	4%
Junior	4%
Senior	35%
Graduate	19%
PhD	11%
Missing	27%

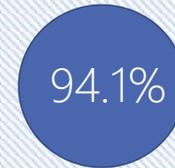
Tribal Affiliation

Bad River	12%
BrothertownNation	6%
Grand River Band of Ottawa Indians and Grand traverse band of Ottawa Indians	6%
Lac Courts Oreilles	6%
Menominee	6%
Muscogee Nation of Oklahoma	6%
Nagaajiwanaang	6%
Oneida	12%
Samish Nation	6%
Sault Ste Marie Ojibwa	6%
Sault Ste Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians	17%
Wichita and Affiliated Tribes	6%
Missing	6%

Internship Location

California	4%
Michigan	31%
Wisconsin	57%
Virtual	4%
Missing	4%

Intern Completion Rate



Program Effectiveness: reach of NARCH programs

At current best count, GLNARCH efforts have produced, for both researchers and students, written publications (n=26; peer reviewed journal articles, technical reports, and community-focused reports) and in-person dissemination of information (n= 60; presentations and posters). GLNARCH has placed 173 research undergraduate and/or graduate internships across 37 performance sites under (approximately) 24 mentors ranging from tribal health departments to mainstream universities. Network support from the Center has led to 10 non-NARCH grants totaling approximately \$6.96 million [12, 13] with more in the works.

Figure 2 outlines the programmatic reach of GLNARCH since 2003. These metrics cover our stated goal to: “Provide internship & mentor opportunities to increase the number of AI/AN students engaged in health sciences.” The GLNARCH staff are still counting student contributions to academic outputs. The current best estimates are 39 posters, 13 presentations, and 19 peer-reviewed publications, covering 26 self-reported areas of research interest. The program provides rich and diverse opportunities across 45 internship sites with 90 mentors/mentor candidates. At least 33 Tribes have been represented in GLNARCH initiatives since 2003.

Figure 2: Program effectiveness internship, mentor, and research opportunities dashboard



Program Effectiveness: Fostering Fidelity

Feedback from 17 students who participated in GLNARCH internships between 2014 and 2020 (more recent internships are ongoing) provided insight both into measurable productivity of students and the quality of students’ experiences (Figure 3). These results showed students had opportunities to disseminate their research, cultivate better understandings of research and community engagement, and develop valuable skills they would take further into their academic careers. Evaluation from GLNARCH interns who have participated since 2014 indicate broad satisfaction with the program as well as perceived self-efficacy. These satisfaction metrics reflect a congruence with NARCH values of helping the community and cultural sensitivity.

Figure 3: Internship evaluation fostering fidelity dashboard



Program Effectiveness: Networking and Professional Development

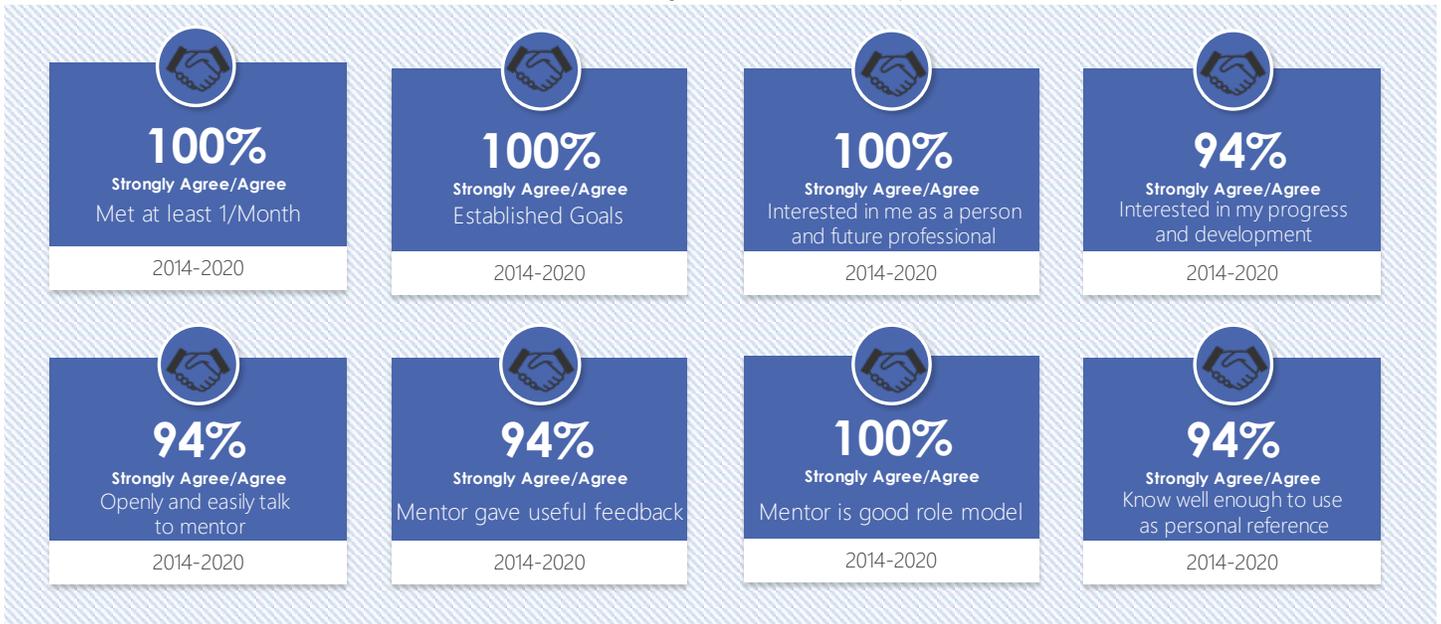
Figure 4 demonstrates strong, near unanimous agreement that the GLNARCH program matches interns with effective mentors. Since 2014 all mentees report regular meetings, goal establishment, and strong personal relationships. Most interns leave the program with a strong personal reference to help develop their professional network.

Figure 4: Internship evaluation networking and professional development dashboard



Program Effectiveness Dashboard

Internship Evaluation – Student Responses
Goal 2. Networking and Professional Development



Program Effectiveness: Contribution to the Field

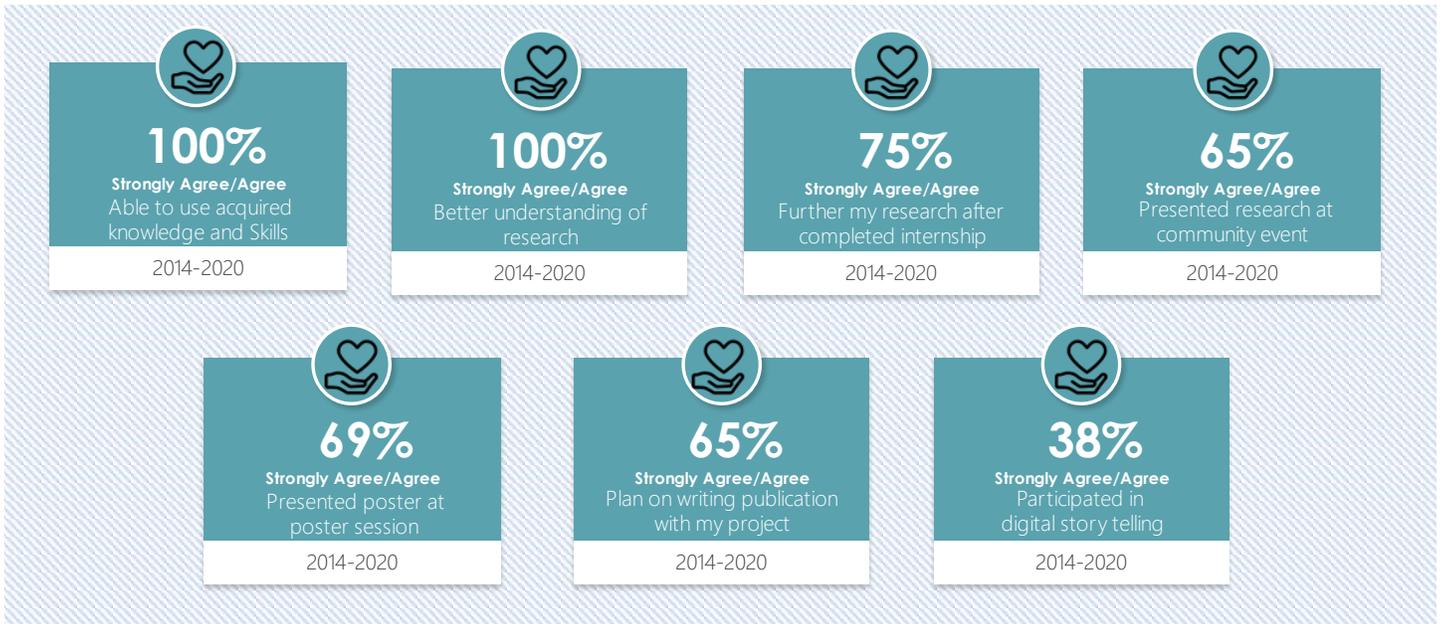
Most interns and mentees plan to continue their research after completing the internship (75%), present their findings at poster sessions (69%) and write publications associated with their projects (65%). Fewer, (38%) participated in the digital storytelling opportunities at GLNARCH. All interns reported a stronger ability to use their acquired knowledge and skills as well as reported a better understanding of research (Figure 5).

Figure 5: *Internship evaluation contributions to the field dashboard*



Program Effectiveness Dashboard

Internship Evaluation – Student Responses
Goal 3. Contribution to the Field



Program Effectiveness: Contribution to the Field

Figure 6 covers multiple metrics demonstrating adherence to community engagement research practices. GLNARCH mentees report high agreement that the program is sensitive to ethical, cultural, and participatory research principles. Most interns report working within communities (67%) whereas some internships did not lend themselves to community work (e.g., fish contaminant monitoring programs in Upper Michigan). Most interns felt that their projects made a positive difference in the community (78%).

Figure 6: *Internship evaluation engaging community involvement/cultural context dashboard*



Program Effectiveness Dashboard

Internship Evaluation – Student Responses
Goal 4. Engaging community involvement/cultural context



Program Effectiveness: Development of student’s awareness, interest, and skills in health sciences.

GLNARCH interns from 2014-2020 reported high satisfaction with their accomplishments under the program. The strongest responses in these metrics indicate that the program is stimulating, challenging, and affirming towards student development of health science skills. The least supported sentiment in this category was commitment to a career in health sciences, nevertheless a majority (67%) affirmed this interest. Past experience suggests that students may go on to pursue other academic and scientific careers not classified as health science.

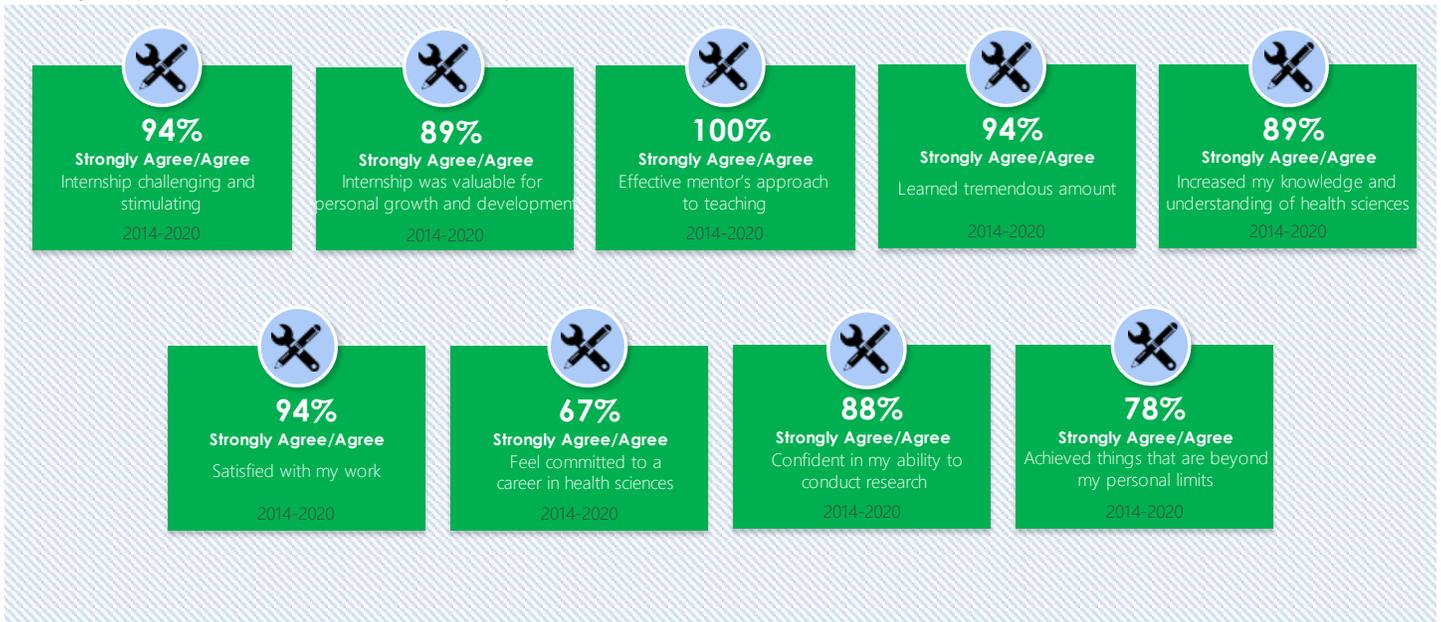
Figure 6: *Internship evaluation developing awareness, interest, and skills dashboard*



Program Effectiveness Dashboard

Internship Evaluation – Student Responses

Goal 5. Development of student's awareness, interest, and skills in health sciences



Overall Progress Towards Center Goals

GLNARCH Capacity Building accomplishments are listed in Table 1. The established relationship carried forward from the NEHR NARCH VIII-NARCH X provides examples and references for building bridges with the other four Bemidji TCUs. NEHR expansions will also include Bemidji area Native-serving mainstream institutions in addition to the targeted TCUs. Some AI/AN GLNARCH advisors (listed in the Administrative Core Community Scientific Advisory Committee (CSAC)) are also faculty at those Bemidji region institutions. These include, but are not limited to, University of Minnesota – Duluth, University of Northern Michigan, Michigan Technological University, UW-Stevens Point, UW-Oshkosh, and Lake Superior State University.

Table 2: Capacity Component accomplishments (GLNARCH X) and next steps/deliverables (GLNARCH XII)

GOALS	NARCH X ACCOMPLISHMENTS	NARCH XII TARGETS, PER YEAR
Recruit TCUs into NEHR	Expanded from 2 TCUs to 4TCUs	Recruit additional 2/year
Equipment and supply purchases	Gas Chromatograph, SONDEs (passive water quality monitor), Spectrophotometer	Support new instrumentation and supply purchases at TCU/Partners
Build partnerships, hold networking meetings	TEHS 2020 postponed, annual CSAC meetings, 8 site visits, 2 conference presentations, 1 panel discussion, 1 multi-TCU teleconference	Quarterly TCUS site visits or teleconference, host TEHS 2022, yearly CSAC meetings (admin)
Support research	2 on site REDCap™ tutorials, other topics paused due to pandemic	Match research with small supply funds (1-6 seed grants), trainings
Training and education	Matched 2 interns and 3 mentors from student enhancement component	Continue intern, expertise, and mentor matching (1≤ matches/year)
Increase cultural partnerships in NEHR	Developed short film with Family Circles AODA program, begun video catalogue of that curriculum, assist Elders in sharing wisdom	Continue film production of catalogue, expand video library of GLNARCH YouTube™ channel (1-2/year)
Enhance tribal oversight	Contributed to advisory committee reports, regular consultation with GLITC board and health boards	Continue as before, add GLTIC/tribal IRB scoping review to establish GLITC IRB (1 report/year)

Both GLNARCH Project PI/PDs (plus all research and Student Career Enhancement PIs) participate in conference calls every other week facilitated by Dr. Dellinger. These calls along with the oversight provided by the CSAC and its sub-committees will assure GLNARCH project progression and cohesion. Ms. Poupart, Dr. Dellinger, Dr. Laverdure, Dr. Stevens and Dr. Cassidy consult tribal health directors and other tribal officials within the three-state area quarterly via a combination of face-to-face meetings, site-visits, and conference calls. Dr. Dellinger, Ms. Poupart, and the GLNARCH CSAC Chair (Mr. Jackson) often brief boards of directors and Tribal Chairs on site at the rotating venues in tribal reservations. An overview of these and other activities are presented in Figure 7.

Figure 7: *Progress in NARCH activities dashboard*

Overall Progress Dashboard

Goal B: Engagement with research, community events, new opportunities and internships



Community Wellness and Resilience

Broadly, the results of the wellness questionnaire suggest positive sentiments regarding cultural matters. Many respondents reported that they feel healthy. Health is often reported as a difficult term to define for different cultures and many participants, but not a majority, reported a culturally specific term for health and wellness. The most common term was “minobimaadaziwin” and which translate roughly to “living in a good way.” Most participants in the pilot reported habitually giving thanks. “Giving thanks” was developed by the Anishnaabe members of the survey development team to reflect the level of respect for cultural and spiritual traditions. As with the previous wellness survey from 2019, many respondents seem unsure or concerned that their culture is respected outside the community. Also, less people reported optimism about passing on their culture (71%) than reported connection to the land (100%) community (87%) and giving thanks (100%).

Figure 8: Metrics from the GLNARCH community wellness questionnaire dashboard



Community Wellness Dashboard

NARCH Dashboard

2021

(N)15

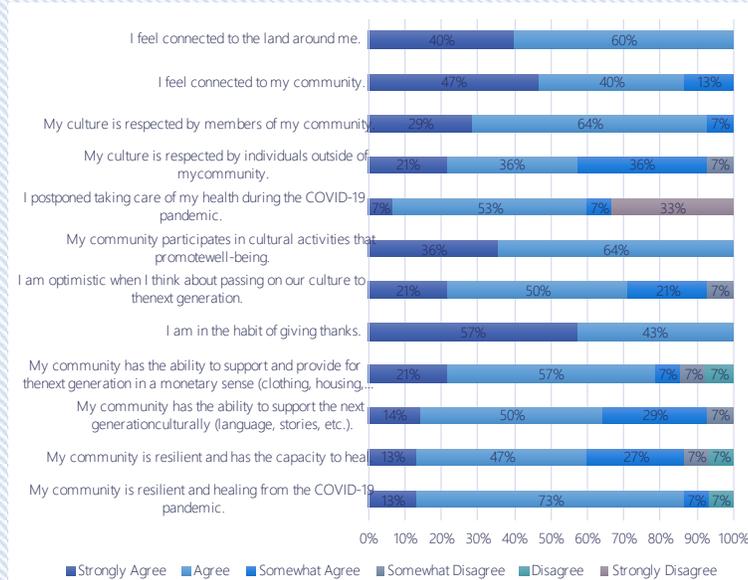
Traditional Word for Well-Being



Tribe

Oneida	13%
Lac du Flambeau	53%
Potawatomi	7%
Leech Lake	7%
Ho Chunk	7%
Menominee	13%

Survey Items



Overall Perception of Health



DISCUSSION

The GLNARCH evaluation outcomes align with the four core components: 1) the administrative core, 2) research projects; 3) the student career enhancement component that exposes tribal students to academic opportunities, and 4) capacity building to extend research opportunities for projects that focus on the priorities of Bemidji tribes. Many respondents to the culture and wellness pilot reported that they feel healthy, but this metric yielded less agreement than those relating to the importance of culture (i.e., giving thanks and connection to land). Respondents were less sure of their ability to pass on cultural teachings to the next generation. The data suggest that many were concerned about the perpetuation of culture. It was clear from discussions with these participants that sustaining the culture was a priority.

GLNARCH excels in community-based research, training, education, and cultural engagement due to the time investment from the PIs and staff since 2003 developing trusting, personal relationships with the local tribal communities and consortia. In addition to their publication record as a team [1, 3-5], Dr. Dellinger, Ms. Poupart (Flambeau Ojibwe), and Mr. Jackson (Flambeau Ojibwe) have lifelong friendships and familial ties with the tribal communities in the Bemidji region. Dr. Stevens has an exemplary national reputation over

two decades as a NARCH mentor, PI, and TCU department chair. Medical College of Wisconsin and Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council, have successful track records of developing and executing rigorous research projects. Drs. Cassidy and Dellinger have spent the past 8 years building the institutional relationships between MCW and GLITC. There is no replacement for the current GLNARCH relationships which took many years to foster and mature. Perhaps most importantly, relationship building within GLNARCH permanently connects disparate resources into durable partnerships that augment long term research and training capacity. This applies to interns, mentors, mentees, and research partners

GLNARCH overcomes significant barriers to higher education and does so in a manner that promotes well-being, self-care, and self-esteem through culturally informed methods. These above approaches are not only more successful in preventing attrition and increasing graduation rates, but also serve to increase trust between students, communities, and institutions. Transitioning from undergraduate to graduate studies is a critical time when many students struggle. The new GLNARCH SCEP will ease this transition, creating cohort support networks and matching students with faculty mentors.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMENDATIONS

The current evaluation indicates high satisfaction with the GLNARCH program across all participant categories. Community engagement activities are moving along despite the disruptive events of 2021. The team has adapted over time to improve the reach and impact of the program. Improved tracking of academic outputs and student outcomes remain important challenges and priorities. The goals of NARCH require long-term planning and perseverance to navigate the complexities of joining biomedical sciences with indigenous perspectives. The GLNARCH team are veterans in this realm with the motivation and skills to accomplish the proposed goals. The focus on culture and tradition to increase community engagement is an important conceptual direction to advance NARCH's role in the Great Lakes.

GLNARCH is ahead of the curve in current best practices for assessment [14] since community characteristics: culture, demographics, and equity are foundational to the program. It is essential to program assessment that evaluators are be mindful of the communities they serve be they students or participants. Continues to use appropriate student-focused and cultural language. GLNARCH will continue to use and develop assessment tools that are culturally responsive to our population (i.e., students, collaborators, and

community). Furthermore, we will continue efforts to ensure these data represent the student and the communities served by GLNARCH. Ensuring continued exploration of these assessment data will uncover potential gaps in the programs and make data informed changes. It is necessary to pursue these inferences with relatively small sample sizes.

Specific recommendations and next steps include 1) Develop a summary dashboard (one page) for each core component, 2) Continue to explore measures of success for each component, 3) Solicit feedback from stakeholders (Explore data we are currently collecting, is it appropriate? Does it tell the NARCH story?) 4) Develop a process to cover data gaps, 5) Emphasize the evolving nature of assessment and promote a vision of success that responds to the most valued learning goals of our service area.

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