

## ***CES4Health.info: A Web-Based Mechanism for Disseminating Peer-Reviewed Products of Community-Engaged Scholarship: Reflections on Year One***

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### **Abstract**

CES4Health.info was launched in November 2009 as an online mechanism for peer reviewing and disseminating products of community-engaged scholarship in forms other than journal articles. One year after its launch, the authors conducted an online survey of CES4Health.info contributing authors, reviewers, and users of published products. Early evidence suggests that CES4Health.info may be helpful for recognizing community-engaged scholarship in promotion and tenure processes and for providing communities with resources to address community health concerns.

### **Setting the Context**

**D**r. Richards (an assistant professor of public health at a research-intensive university), Arts Force (a youth arts organization), and AIDS Aware! (a community-based HIV/AIDS awareness and advocacy organization) developed a reciprocal, respectful partnership over several years. Together, they designed and conducted a rigorous mixed-methods investigation of the attitudes of young people in their community toward sexual risk-taking behavior. One product of this collaborative research endeavor was a video aimed at high school students, produced by the youth with input and guidance from the adult partners. The edgy, hard-hitting video communicated information about social, emotional, and health outcomes of sexual risk-taking behavior based on Dr. Richards' review of the literature and prevention messages informed by the findings of their collaborative research. The video was integrated into health classes in area high schools and utilized by the local health department in community-based health promotion initiatives.

Although fictitious, this is an example of an innovative product of rigorous community-engaged scholarship created by academic and community partners. Similarly, a service-learning partnership could author a policy report of options for eliminating

homelessness, or community-campus partners could develop a toolkit from the evidence-based service delivery program they designed.

The creators of such innovative products of community-engaged scholarship face common challenges (Calleson, Jordan, &

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Seifer, 2005). They lack mechanisms for broad dissemination of their work, which often limits the impact of their products to the local community (Cashman et al., 2008; Wolff & Maurana, 2001). They lack peer-reviewed publication outlets designed specifically for diverse scholarly products (Commission on Community-Engaged Scholarship in the Health Professions, 2005). The format of peer-reviewed journals is inappropriate for such

diverse products. Moreover, the peer review process may not find value in them (Nyden, 2003). Journals may utilize academic reviewers that cannot critique the rigor and quality of the engaged approach (Ellison & Eatman, 2008). However, without mechanisms for peer review and broad dissemination, these products typically do not “count” in university faculty promotion and tenure systems. Historically, promotion and tenure processes value peer-reviewed manuscripts that are published in top-ranked disciplinary journals (ASA Task Force 2005; Ellison & Eatman 2008; Gelmon & Agre-Kippenhan, 2002; Jackson, Schwartz, & Andree, 2008; O’Meara & Edgerton 2005).

CES4Health.info (<http://www.ces4health.info>) was developed to fill this gap. CES4Health.info is a web-based project developed as part of the Faculty for the Engaged Campus (FEC) initiative, a program coordinated by Community-Campus Partnerships for Health (CCPH), and funded by a 2007–2010 U.S. Department of Education Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) grant.

The purpose of the Faculty for the Engaged Campus initiative was to strengthen community-engaged academic career paths by

1. developing innovative competency-based models of faculty development,
2. facilitating peer review and dissemination of community-engaged scholarship products, and

3. supporting faculty in the promotion and tenure process (CCPH, 2011).

In this article the authors describe how CES4Health.info works. They also report on the first year of CES4Health.info from the perspective of authors, the peer-reviewers of submissions, and users of engagement products published on the site.

### **Overview of CES4Health.info**

Launched in November 2009, CES4Health.info is a system for the peer review and online publication and dissemination of diverse products of health-related community-engaged scholarship. CES4Health.info publishes new products as well as products that have been previously self-published. Its goal is to publish and disseminate results of community-engaged projects through formats such as photovoice exhibits, policy briefs, educational videos, and podcasts (Bordeaux *et al.*, 2007). Examples include a policy brief about the growing aging population in Chicago (George *et al.*, 2009) and a video documenting concern about the health impacts of the built environment in post-Katrina New Orleans (Catalani *et al.*, 2009).

Community-engaged scholarship can also lead to the development of tools to assist other community-engaged scholars (e.g., assessment instruments, instructional manuals, patient education materials). For example, CES4Health.info published a toolkit to establish and sustain a year-long walking program in rural communities (Zendell & Riley-Jacome, 2009), and a web-based tool to create customized family health history materials for families, organizations, or communities (Edelson, O'Leary, & Terry, 2010).

CES4Health.info defines "health" broadly to include physical and mental health, health promotion, community health, social determinants of health (e.g., literacy, employment, food security), workforce issues, and professional development. For example, Taylor and Maddocks (2009) produced proceedings from a conference on mental health, delinquency, and criminal activity. Montoya (2009) developed a video to make the case that social factors of inequity make people ill. Jorge and Wilhite (2009) developed a training video to help physical rehabilitation professionals maximize their clinical interventions with individuals working in agriculture as well as to illustrate the clinical case management of farmers and ranchers with disabilities.

## **The Development of CES4Health.info**

CES4Health.info was developed in 2008–2009 by a six-person design team of community-engaged academics, leaders of community organizations with experience in community-academic partnerships, and individuals responsible for editing journals or online resource repositories that publish diverse forms of scholarship. The team studied the experience of these journals and repositories to develop and pilot review criteria, a reviewer application, author instructions, and an accompanying application (Reynolds & Candler, 2008; Tandon et al., 2007). In the pilot phase, authors were invited to submit products. Peer reviewers were recruited and trained. Twelve products were published as a result of this pilot phase. Concurrently, a web design firm developed and beta tested [www.CES4Health.info](http://www.CES4Health.info), including the user interface and the administration tool that permits online submission and review of products and management of the editorial and peer review process.

## **The CES4Health.info Submission Process**

The CES4Health.info submission includes two parts: the product itself, and an application. The application records the product aims, the quality of the product, the alignment of the product's content and format with the needs of the intended audience, and the significance or impact of the product. The author is also asked to

- articulate the scholarly basis of the product
- describe the community-engaged activities that resulted in the product,
- reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the submission,
- describe the quality of the community-academic partnership,
- describe the ways that community engagement shaped and enhanced the work, and
- document the extent and appropriateness of the engagement process.

The application becomes part of the published package and is considered part of the scholarly product. The combination of submission of the product itself and the application results in a peer review similar in rigor to one for journal manuscripts.

## **The CES4Health.info Peer Review Process**

The review process mirrors typical journal and editorial processes. All products are reviewed by four reviewers. The editor makes the final determination and communicates the decision to the author. A CES4Health.info review also includes some innovative enhancements. All products are assigned to two academic and two community-based reviewers. Reviewers participate in a one-hour phone training conducted by the editor to ensure that all reviewers are well prepared to undertake the review process and understand the review criteria.

The review criteria are well articulated and benchmarked using a formal reviewer rating form. Criteria focus on clear goals and intended audience, scholarly basis, methodological rigor, significance and impact, quality of the community-engaged approach, and ethical behavior. The criteria are modifications of criteria articulated by Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff (1997), who operationalized Boyer's (1990) expanded definition of scholarship, recommendations from a national commission convened by CCPH (*Commission on Community-Engaged Scholarship in the Health Professions*, 2005), and previous work of Jordan et al., who developed standards of quality community-engaged scholarship (2009). The review criteria are available at <http://www.ces4health.info/reviewer/peer-review-process.aspx>.

Since the launch of the online system in November 2009, 25 products have been submitted (not including products submitted as part of the pilot phase); 27% of those products were rejected (including some that were deemed by the editor to be inappropriate for CES4Health.info and thus not assigned to reviewers), and 73% were accepted with revision (all but a few were revised as suggested and have since been accepted). All accepted submissions required some degree of revision to the product or the accompanying application.

## **Features of CES4Health.info to Assist Promotion and Tenure Processes**

CES4Health.info includes a number of features intended to ensure that published products are favorably considered in promotion and tenure processes. First, authors are provided with a citation for their published product that can be included in the peer-reviewed publication section of their curriculum vitae and in their promotion and tenure dossiers. Second, the number of times a product is downloaded is tracked, and is provided to

the author upon request. Third, users who download products are surveyed. Aggregate information about the perceived utility of an author's products can be provided to authors desiring to demonstrate broad dissemination effectiveness of their community-engaged scholarship products. Fourth, in the product application, authors are invited to provide the names and e-mail addresses of colleagues they would like alerted to their successful publication. If the product is published on CES4Health.info, the editor sends an e-mail letter to those individuals to highlight the author's success, and to raise awareness of community-engaged scholarship among the author's administrators and promotion and tenure committee members.

### **Measuring the Impact of CES4Health.info in Year One**

Assessment of CES4Health.info is ongoing, and includes IRB-approved online surveys of authors, reviewers, and users (those who have downloaded one or more products). Key areas addressed with authors and reviewers include

- satisfaction with the process of review—submission, communication, timeliness of response (for authors); identification as a reviewer, training, notifications, communication with editorial staff (for reviewers);
- satisfaction with and value of the feedback received as a result of the review (for authors);
- satisfaction with the guidance provided to reviewers to perform review (for reviewers);
- ability to use the feedback from CES4Health.info in their individual tenure/promotion review process (for authors);
- strengths of the process and opportunities for improvement;
- utility of the CES4Health website;
- value of the community-engaged scholarship criteria; and
- other needs/resources for peer review that would be helpful.

Surveys of users focus on utility of the CES4Health.info website, perceptions of the products available for download, and recommendations for improvement of CES4Health.info.

## **The Sample and Data Collection Process**

At the time of this analysis in November 2010, 24 products had been peer-reviewed and disseminated through CES4Health.info, and 382 unique individuals had downloaded products. After the public launch of CES4Health.info, the corresponding authors of the 12 products accepted during the pilot phase and the reviewers of those products were sent an e-mail invitation with a link to an online survey. The corresponding authors and the reviewers of the 12 products published after the public launch were sent an invitation e-mail with a link to an online survey approximately one month after publication of the product they authored or reviewed. User surveys were conducted in June, September, and November 2010 in order to reach all users in CES4Health.info's first year. The authors also collected statistics concerning user rates of accessing and downloading available products. There was possible overlap between author, reviewer, and user samples. Participants were sent separate requests and surveys for author, reviewer, and user data collection. Therefore the same individual might receive more than one survey request and complete these surveys separately.

## **Data Analysis Process**

Survey responses to quantitative questions were counted and percentages calculated. Comments in response to qualitative questions were reviewed to identify emerging themes and to choose descriptive quotations to illustrate points made below.

## **Findings**

A total of 425 surveys were sent by e-mail to valid addresses. Response rates are indicated in Table 1. In this section, respondents are referred to as "authors," "reviewers," or "users," reflecting their relationship with CES4Health.info. The overall response rate was 26%; however, response rates for authors and reviewers were considerably higher than the response rate for users. Response rates for individual questions in the remainder of this section are variable, based on valid responses to each question (some respondents did not answer all questions).

**Table 1. Survey Distribution and Responses**

	Authors N	Reviewers N	Users N
Number of surveys e-mailed	24	58	343
Number of respondents	17	36	58
Response rate	71%	62%	17%

## Profile of the Respondents

Ten of the responding reviewers and nine of the responding authors were also user respondents. Approximately 74% ( $n = 82$ ) of respondents were employed in academic settings (Table 2). The affiliation of respondents not working in higher education varied greatly. Almost one quarter ( $n = 7$ ) each were from government agencies, from community-based nonprofits, and from hospitals or health systems.

**Table 2. Employed at a Higher Education Institution?**

	Authors	Reviewers	Users	Total
Yes	$N = 13$ 76%	$N = 23$ 64%	$N = 46$ 79%	$N = 82$ 74%
No	$N = 4$ 24%	$N = 13$ 36%	$N = 12$ 21%	$N = 29$ 26%
Total respondents	$N = 17$ 100%	$N = 36$ 100%	$N = 58$ 100%	$N = 111$ 100%

## Author feedback.

In general, the 17 responding authors were satisfied with the various elements of preparing for the submission of a product (Table 3). Where dissatisfaction was expressed, responses revealed that authors felt there was a lack of clarity in what can be submitted, and how to prepare and submit a product. Authors were most satisfied with the responsiveness of editorial staff to their inquiries, with 93% ( $n=14$ ) indicating satisfaction.



**Table 3. Author Satisfaction with Preparation for Submission**

Submission feature	Strongly satisfied or satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied or strongly dissatisfied
Communications about submitting a product for review	N = 12 80%	N = 2 13%	N = 1 7%
Clarity of materials provided about the submission process	N = 11 73%	N = 3 20%	N = 1 7%
Clarity of materials provided about the review process	N = 12 86%	N = 2 14%	N = 0 0%
Clarity of review criteria	N = 11 73%	N = 4 27%	N = 0 0%
Guidance for formatting a product for review	N = 9 60%	N = 5 33%	N = 1 7%
Responsiveness of CES4Health.info staff to queries about submission	N = 14 93%	N = 1 7%	N = 0 0%

Twelve (80%) authors indicated that they noted the product as a peer-reviewed publication on their curriculum vitae. Eight (72%) respondents felt that their CES4Health.info publication would make a difference in future performance reviews; three (27%) felt that it would not. One respondent stated: “As a peer reviewed publication, it will definitely count on my tenure review.”

Authors were asked what has resulted from their product’s publication. Five (about 50%) indicated that they had received recognition from a supervisor or peers. One respondent commented that it “has provided a great way to disseminate the product on a national level.”

Some comments offered by authors reflect the degree to which they recognize and appreciate the rigor of the process. For example, one wrote, “I appreciated the depth of background, justification, and rationale that was required of the reviewers. It instilled faith in the rigor and value of the peer review process.”

Authors were asked their reasons for submitting a product for review and encouraged to choose multiple responses. The most frequent reason given was to get the product published (see Table 4).

**Table 4. Reasons to Submit a Product for Review (Authors Only)**

Reason	N	%
I wanted to get published.	10	59%
I wanted to have it disseminated.	9	53%
I was curious to see what the review process would reveal.	6	35%
I am coming up for review and I wanted an external peer review.	4	24%
I wanted to get opinions on my work from individuals outside of my organization.	3	18%

### Reviewer feedback.

Overall, the 36 responding reviewers were satisfied with their preparation to be a reviewer (Table 5) and with the review process (Table 6). The only area of possible dissatisfaction was the time frame allowed to complete a review, which was 2 weeks at the beginning of the first year, but was later extended to 4 weeks.

**Table 5. Reviewer Satisfaction with Preparation for Conducting Reviews**

Preparation feature	Strongly satisfied or satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied or strongly dissatisfied
Communications about serving as a reviewer	N = 34 100%	N = 0 0%	N = 0 0%
Timeframe between applying and being accepted as a reviewer	N = 32 94%	N = 1 3%	N = 1 3%
Training to be a reviewer	N = 30 88%	N = 4 12%	N = 0 0%
Clarity of materials provided for training	N = 31 91%	N = 3 9%	N = 0 0%

**Table 6. Reviewer Satisfaction with the Review Process**

Review feature	Strongly satisfied or satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied or strongly dissatisfied
Adequacy of timeframe to conduct review	N = 31 91%	N = 1 3%	N = 2 6%
Clarity of review criteria	N = 32 94%	N = 2 6%	N = 0 0%
Alignment of product topic with my expertise	N = 33 97%	N = 1 3%	N = 0 0%
User-friendliness of online review form	N = 28 82%	N = 5 15%	N = 1 3%

## User feedback.

Between November 2009 and November 2010, there were 749 product downloads of the 24 available products, with an average of almost two products per user, and with the number of downloads per product ranging from 10 to 108. Overall, 81% of the 58 responding users ( $n = 39$ ) felt that the product they downloaded was very, or somewhat, useful. Users were asked for the reasons they decided to search CES4Health.info; they could select multiple responses. Thirty (52%) indicated that they wanted to see this CCPH resource; 29 (50%) also indicated curiosity (Table 7).

**Table 7. Decision to Search CES4Health.info (Users Only)**

Reason	<i>N</i>	%
I find the CCPH resources useful and wanted to see this one.	30	52%
I was curious.	29	50%
I wanted to check it out before submitting a product for review.	10	17%
I wanted to check it out before offering to be a reviewer.	9	16%
I have used other similar portals and wanted to try this one out.	6	10%
I was looking for a specific kind of product and one of my colleagues suggested I look at this website.	3	5%

Users were generally satisfied with the CES4Health.info website and the information provided about available products. Only 57% ( $n = 28$ ) were satisfied with the number of products that matched what they were searching for; this likely reflects the early stages of development of this resource and the fact that the volume of products available is not yet very high. Ninety-five percent of user respondents ( $n = 45$ ) expect to use CES4Health.info again in the future. Specific comments about future use included, “An easy-to-use website so it will be a regular stop for my work”; “I will be looking for examples of what types of work are published”; and “The more this develops, and more resources that are available, the more powerful this will become. I am excited for that!”

## Suggestions for Improvement

Both users and reviewers were asked what would encourage them to submit a product to CES4Health.info in the future.

The most frequent responses suggested that a web-based tutorial be created to guide authors through the submission process. Respondents also indicated the importance of increasing awareness about the types of products that would be appropriate for CES4Health.info. Users indicated that they would like to post reviews of products on the website as well as e-mail product authors directly from the site.

## Discussion

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*“CES4Health.info addresses a common challenge—a lack of venue for peer review and publication of products of community-engaged scholarship in forms other than journal articles—and is, thus, valuable to faculty work and career advancement.”*

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The evaluation of CES4Health.info in its first year (November 2009 to November 2010) provides insight into the utility and potential impact of this resource. Authors see CES4Health.info as a venue for publication that offers them valuable feedback about their product, provides them with an opportunity to present their work as credible scholarship to their colleagues, and expands the reach of their community-engaged scholarship products. The authors believe that CES4Health.info addresses a common challenge—a lack of venue for peer review and publication of products of community-engaged scholarship in forms other than journal articles—and is, thus, valuable to

faculty work and career advancement. Early anecdotal evidence suggests that CES4Health.info may be helpful for recognizing community-engaged scholarship in promotion and tenure processes.

## Limitations of the Assessment

This first assessment of CES4Health.info has several limitations. First, the timing of the survey, only 1 year post-launch, limits the generalizability and scope of the findings. The sample size available at this early stage was small. Consequently, the number of respondents is too few to allow firm conclusions. Moreover, the authors cannot report on impact of CES4Health.info on faculty authors' promotion and tenure reviews, or the usefulness of

published products in such reviews, as most authors have not pursued promotion or tenure since their CES4Health.info publication. The timing of future evaluations will allow more authors to have completed career advancement processes and will focus on the impact of CES4Health.info on promotion and tenure.

Second, the low response rate for users means that feedback was not secured from the majority of people who have downloaded products. Third, the sample included only those authors whose products were published and the reviewers who reviewed those successful products. These respondents were therefore not representative of all authors and reviewers who had participated.

### **Next Steps for CES4Health.info**

The assessment of the first year of this endeavor suggests that, overall, authors, reviewers, and users see value in CES4Health.info. They are satisfied with its submission, review, and product search processes. Some areas noted by survey respondents as weaknesses have already been addressed. For example, some reviewers were concerned about the length of time permitted for review completion. The review period was extended from 2 to 4 weeks during the first year. Other suggestions for improvement are being considered. Continued assessment of CES4Health.info, and increased marketing and outreach, will help to enhance its use, usefulness, and impact.

CES4Health.info will continue to be sponsored by Community Campus Partnerships for Health with editorial offices provided by the University of Minnesota Extension's Children, Youth and Family Consortium, the affiliation of the founding editor. Funding is being sought to make improvements to the online system and to support themed calls for products, collaborations with other publications as well as community partners, and initiatives to support the application of published products in communities.

### **Conclusion**

CES4Health.info provides individuals working to improve health in communities with accessible, useful information typically not published in journals by disseminating an array of products that have been reviewed and deemed high quality by community and academic peers. Recognizing the lack of peer-reviewed publication outlets (*Nyden, 2003*) and the absence of community voice in the peer review of community-engaged work (*Ellison & Eatman, 2008*), the Commission on Community-Engaged Scholarship in the

Health Professions (2005) called for the development of a national board to provide peer preview of innovative products of community-engaged scholarship. CES4health.info answers that call by providing a mechanism for the peer review and online publication of innovative scholarly products, increasing the chances that these products will be “counted” in promotion and tenure decisions (ASA Task Force 2005; Ellison & Eatman, 2008; Gelmon & Agre-Kippenhan, 2002; Jackson, Schwartz, & Andree, 2008; O’Meara & Edgerton, 2005).

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**Sarena D. Seifer** is executive director of Community-Campus Partnerships for Health, a nonprofit organization that promotes health equity and social justice through partnerships between communities and higher educational institutions. Her work focuses on ensuring the conditions are in place for these partnerships to thrive and to transform the people, organizations, and communities involved. Seifer earned her bachelor's degree from Washington University in St. Louis and her master's and medical degrees from Georgetown University.