



**TEXAS**  
Health and Human  
Services

**Texas Department of State  
Health Services**

**Theory to Practice: Public Health Region 6/5S partners with a UTHealth class to create healthier communities in rural southeast Texas**

UTHealth School of Public Health and the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) strengthen the health of Texas communities through educational collaboration. Faculty from UTHealth and staff from DSHS recognize the mutual benefits of integrating real world public health scenarios and classroom learning.

Dr. Melissa Valerio-Shewmaker teaches a class on community assessment concepts and methods. The DSHS Public Health Region 6/5S Community Health Services Team come into the classroom each semester to connect the course material to current projects. Students consult with DSHS staff on their community stakeholder assessment projects. These classroom assignments can be used to support and advance the work of DSHS. Recent projects have included a community health needs assessment on maternal and child health in rural communities of southeast Texas.

With UTHealth and DSHS's combined resources, students apply classroom learning to real-world challenges. "Our partnership with the UTHealth Community Assessment course has proven to be a mutually beneficial relationship," said DSHS Community Health Services Program Manager Brandii Grant. "Working with the graduate students provides experience for my staff in the Community Health Services program to share their rural public health knowledge and get additional support to assess communities. It also provides the students with real-world public health practice. The projects we

choose to engage the class with are actual projects with meaningful work and we aim to apply the recommendations set forth by the students at the conclusion of the semester.”

“The partnerships built with the DSHS team has resulted in over eight snapshot projects and reach to multiple subgroups and communities,” said Dr. Melissa Valerio-Shewmaker. “Additionally, our partnerships have resulted in the training of master’s and doctoral students using hands on and real-life practice experiences that have resulted in a greater understanding of health disparities, public health capacity, and the role of practitioners in population health. We would not be able to offer these experiences to students without preceptors such as Ms. Grant and her team.”

This work and connection of the UTHealth Community Assessment Concepts course and the PHR 6/5S Community Health Services Team is a shining example of how academic collaboration can benefit all Texans. Public health is a group effort, and when public health professionals and their organizations come together, a healthier world is achieved.