# Community Action Research Scholars (CARS)

Academy for Research on Community Health, Engagement and Services (ARCHES)

## Mission

The Community Action Research Scholars (CARS) program offers students opportunities to promote healthier behaviors, address key health issues within communities, and engage in service-learning activities with the underserved. Students participate in community-based service learning experiences and didactic sessions designed to improve their skills in community health. Through these experiences they contribute to improving health in the underserved communities where they train.

 “To understand and improve the health of an individual, we must realize that they are a part of a community, don’t tell me about the disease a person has, tell me about the person who has the disease.” Dr. Mark DeHaven, Co- founding director

## Description

 CARS is based on the principles of community-based participatory research (CBPR) and

population medicine, with special emphasis on cultural competence and the social determinants of health. Students enrolled in CARS participate in s coordinated program of instruction, and service- learning experiences. CARS offers students a long-term experience in community engagement and research with cumulative tracking and evaluation of research data.

The CARS program consists of four core curriculum experiences, including:

* Core Concepts Seminars
* Participation in the Community Service Core (CSC)
* Community Service Learning
* Research Leadership and Membership
* Applied Research in a Community Setting

Students who complete CARS requirements receive an ARCHES Certificate of Knowledge in Community Health. After completing the CARS program, students are knowledgeable in CBPR techniques and have significant skills in applied community health improvement.

*“The Community Actions Research Scholars (CARS) is an innovative program that links the university to the community. CARS prepares helping professionals to be aware of social, psychological, economic and cultural determinants of health by participating in comprehensive service-learning experiences and research.” Dr. Daniel Gutierrez, Co-founding director*

## REquirements

To enroll in CARS students must:

* Be a registered UNC Charlotte student.
* Submit an application

To earn an ARCHES Certificate of Knowledge in Community Health, students must:

* Attend CARS orientation session
* Attend the core concepts seminars (two 2-hour sessions)
* Participate yearly in community-based service projects (minimum of 20 hours)

## Teaching Research Methods While researching the underserved

CARS responds directly to the needs for integrating CBPR, population medicine, health promotion and disease prevention, and the social determinants of health in the community-based service and research context. CARS students and community members benefit equally from the program’s array of service-learning opportunities and research projects.

Though the CARS program, students participate in various activities, including but not limited to:

* Volunteering in a free or reduced-fee clinic
* Helping to establish new clinics
* Providing screening or counseling to participants at local health fairs
* Volunteering in local walking and nutrition programs
* Volunteering with hospice and other home-visitation programs
* Contributing to community-based maternal, child health and parenting programs
* Participating in school health fairs
* Volunteering at local social service organizations
* Participating in non-profit programs

## COmmunity Health Fellows program

A subset of CARS students participate in the competitive Community Health Fellows Program. Once students complete training and community service they have the opportunity to collaborate with faculty on research and to achieve fellow status with the opportunity for stipend support.

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