

Project SPARK (Students & Partners Advancing Real-world Knowledge)

Learning Community | 2025–2026 Pilot Year | Lighting the way for community-engaged learning.

Overview

The 2025–2026 academic year will launch the pilot Project SPARK Learning Community at the UCLA Fielding School of Public Health (FSPH). Teaching assistants, postdocs, staff, and faculty from FSPH are able to apply to be a SPARK fellow. Fellows will work toward tangible deliverables, such as developing example assignments, draft modules, or syllabi updates, that integrate community partnerships and engagement into existing or new courses at FSPH. Overall, this initiative brings fellows together to collaboratively explore and apply strategies for embedding meaningful community engagement into graduate-level public health education.

Purpose

The Learning Community provides a collaborative, supportive space to:

- Explore transformative pedagogical frameworks (decolonial, anti-racist, justice-centered).
- Design courses with intentional reciprocal community partnerships.
- Develop strategies to assess outcomes for both students and community partners.

Structure

The Learning Community of SPARK fellows commit to meet in-person in three facilitated gatherings across the academic year (one per term), each focusing on a core area of practice, reflection, and action.

Fall 2025 Gathering 1: Bridging Community-Based Learning and Transformative Pedagogies

Thursday, October 30, 2025 11:00am - 1:00pm

Focus: Decolonial, anti-racist, and justice-centered frameworks

Objectives

- Identify key principles of transformative pedagogies and align them with community-based learning.
- Reflect on positionality, power, and privilege in teaching.
- Develop a conceptual map for embedding transformative practices into a course.

Action Items

- Observe a CBPR course session at FSPH, CHS 296-01 Community-Based Participatory Research & Health Equity: Applying the *Promotor* Model for Social Justice.
- Consult with the UCLA [Teaching & Learning Center](#) and the [Center for Community Engagement](#).

Winter 2026 Gathering 2: Designing Courses with Intentional Community Engagement

Thursday, February 12, 2026 11:00am - 1:00pm

Focus: Purposeful integration of community partnerships

Objectives

- Clarify goals and learning outcomes for community-engaged teaching.
- Explore models for partner engagement, logistics, resource sharing, and course design.
- Draft a community-engaged assignment, module, or syllabus component.

Action Items

- Seek departmental feedback on draft deliverables before Gathering 3.

Spring 2026 Gathering 3: Evaluating Impact Through Shared Outcomes

Thursday, April 16, 2026 11:00am - 1:00pm

Focus: Assessing learning and community impact

Objectives

- Identify meaningful ways to assess student learning in community-engaged projects.
- Co-create assessment strategies with community partners.
- Develop a rubric or plan for evaluating student and partner outcomes.

Participation

Open to teaching assistants, postdocs, staff, and faculty from FSPH. Fellows will commit to attending all three gatherings and developing a community-engaged teaching deliverable. They will receive a certificate along with a \$200 stipend upon completion.

Next Steps

Interested in applying to become a SPARK fellow in the 2025–2026 pilot Learning Community?

Please complete the [application form](#) by **Friday, September 26, 2025** and save the date for a Zoom Information Session on **Thursday, October 9th, 2025 12:00 - 1:00 pm**.

Questions

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Dr. Angie Otiniano Verissimo via email at angie.verissimo@ucla.edu.

Project SPARK is brought to you by the founding members of Women of Color in Academia at FSPH, Drs. Bo-Kyung Elizabeth Kim, Angie Otiniano Verissimo, Whitney Pirtle, May Sudhinaraset, and Courtney Thomas Tobin in partnership with the UCLA Teaching & Learning Center and the Center for Community Engagement. Funding for this project is provided by the UCLA Teaching & Learning Center Educational Innovation Grant.