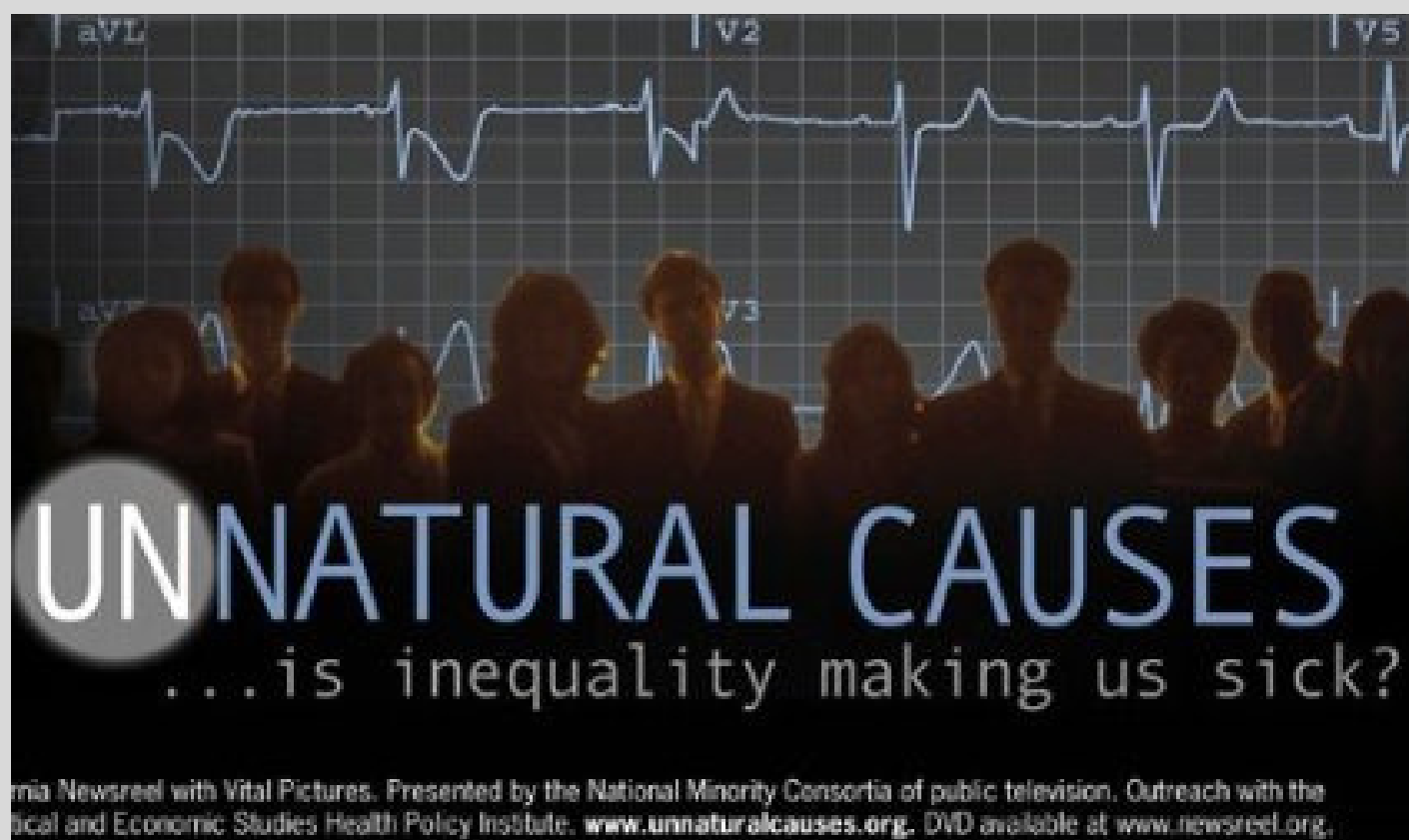


## EVENT REPORT



# UNNATURAL CAUSES FILM SCREENING AND INTERACTIVE COMMUNITY DISCUSSION

**APRIL 1, 2019 - TCNJ LIBRARY AUDITORIUM**



## COMMUNITY PARTNERS:



**National Public Health Week**  
Creating the Healthiest Nation: For science. For action. For health.

April 1 - 7, 2019

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarizes key information from the “Unnatural Causes: Is Inequality Making us Sick?” Film Screening and Interactive Community Discussion, which took place on April 1, 2019 at TCNJ’s Library Auditorium. The event was the result of an extraordinary collaboration that engaged students from three courses at The College of New Jersey: COM 370-08 "Community and Civic Engagement for Health and Development," COM 370-02 "Interpersonal Health Communication," and COM 345 "New Media and Health Communication" (all three courses shared by the Communication Studies and Public Health departments). The event was entirely student-facilitated and was attended by 61 people: 30 students, 6 faculty members, and 25 community members. This was a first-of-its kind event at TCNJ, bringing together students, faculty, administrators, community organizations, and many community members from surrounding towns. The event featured two segments of the award winning PBS documentary, “Unnatural Causes: Is Inequality Making Us Sick?” The two episodes, “When the Bough Breaks” and “Not Just a Paycheck” both focus on the serious impact that chronic stress can have on people's health. The purpose of this event was to discuss health equity with the active participation of students and community members and other event participants, and to focus on the factors that affect health outcomes among disadvantaged populations. The Moth Storytelling format was seamlessly integrated into the whole event as a tool for community dialogue and engagement. The stories shared by event attendees highlighted issues of racism, social discrimination, mental health and well-being, language barriers, unemployment, and gender, among other topics. All stories centered around the ideas of empathy, bravery, and unity. This event helped strengthen the bonds between TCNJ and our surrounding community, bringing together people from all walks of life and varying experiences. It helped show everyone how beneficial community engagement and dialogue may be, and hopefully inspired attendees to continue the conversation in their own immediate communities and at TCNJ.



**THE ROOM WAS FILLED WITH PEOPLE FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE, WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED THEIR OWN STRUGGLES AND TRIUMPHS. WE WERE HAPPY TO BE ABLE TO BRING THEM ALL TOGETHER TO LEARN FROM ONE ANOTHER.**

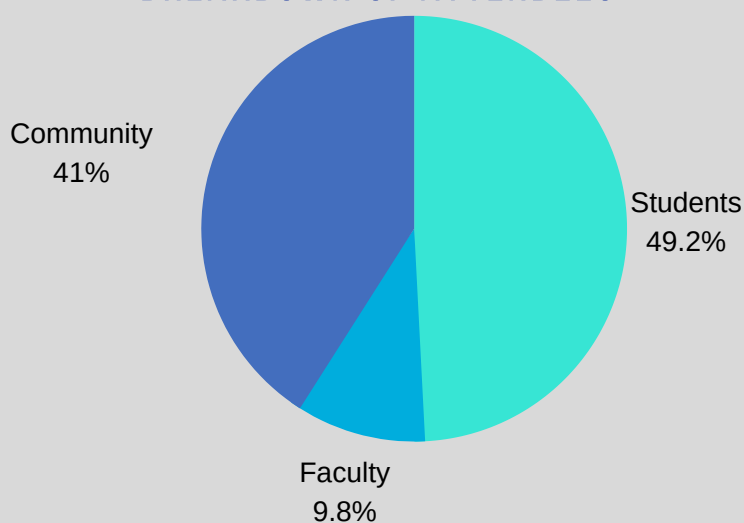
## ABOUT UNNATURAL CAUSES

"Unnatural Causes" is the acclaimed documentary series by California Newsreel and PBS, now used by thousands of organizations around the country to discuss the root causes of our alarming socio-economic and racial inequities in health. (from the "Unnatural Causes" site) At this event, two episodes of the documentary were screened. The first episode, "When the Bough Breaks," is about the impact that the experience of racism has on the health of African American women, particularly during pregnancy. The second episode, "Not Just a Paycheck," examines the impact of layoffs in Michigan among former factory workers. "Not Just a Paycheck" also discusses how Sweden handled similar large-scale layoffs in a way that benefited former employees. These episodes paired well together because both highlighted the negative effects that chronic stress has on people's mental and physical health.

## ABOUT THE EVENT

The purpose of this event was to inform participants about health equity and its relevance in our society. Each class involved in the organizing committee contributed to the overall success of the event, as well as to incorporating many of the concepts learned in their respective class. The Community and Citizen Engagement for Health and Development course (COM370-08) took the lead in the event's organization as part of actual course assignments. This course had been touching upon health equity, among other topics, as well as ways in which community efforts can help advance equity and human rights causes. Many strategies and innovative ideas on how to advance health equity - as well as on the role of community and civic engagement in advancing other health and social issues - were emphasized throughout the event. These ideas emerged from the personal and professional stories shared before the film by students and community partners, and of course, from the episodes we screened from the documentary, and the interactive community discussion facilitated by students.

## BREAKDOWN OF ATTENDEES



## ORGANIZING COMMITTEE\*

### Community and Citizen Engagement for Health and Development Students

Julia Corso, Nicole Crawford, Carly Nocchi, Jack Roma, Sarayu Srinivasan, Ilana Weinberg

### New Media and Health Communication Students

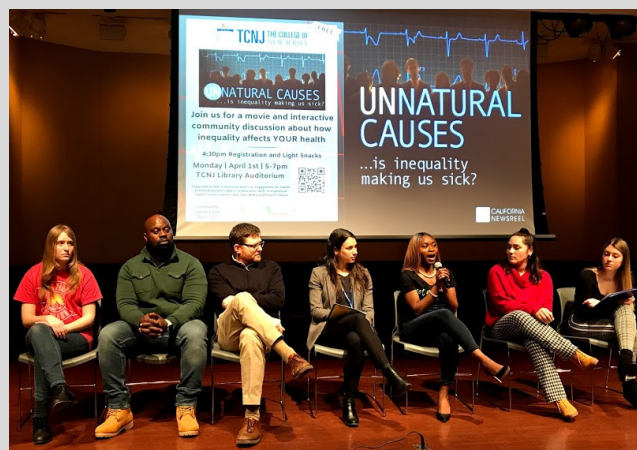
Alexis Marta, Alyssa Sanchez, Sarah Comey, Molly Muha, Amelia Zaleski

### Interpersonal Health Communication Students

Alyssa Mullarkey, Radhika Purandare, Daliah Ouedraogo, Carrie Krewson

### Faculty Advisors

Renata Schiavo, PhD, MA, CCL; Ileana Balcu, MS



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## KEY THEMES AND STORIES

Key themes that emerged during the interactive student-facilitated discussion with event participants are included below. Participants generously shared their touching stories with empathy and compassion. The themes listed below emerged across multiple stories. Given the brief format of this report, we are only including a few of the stories that were shared at the event on each of these themes.

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### RACE

Several African American community members elaborated on the impact of racism on health. One story brought to life the impact of racial profiling on mental well-being. In fact, one of the participants shared a personal story about having being targeted by the police - alongside a Muslim woman - because of their race. She remembers getting off the train and being questioned by police officers who misidentified them as the culprits of a pick-pocketing crime - solely on the basis of their race. Interestingly, both women are accomplished professionals who were on their way to a meeting they had to miss. The feeling of that experience - and the stress associated with this kind of event and other forms of social discrimination - still stay with many of the participants who shared stories on racism and its impact on people's well-being.

### MENTAL HEALTH

Several members from the audience contributed to our discussion concerning mental health. A student facilitator shared a friend's story to illustrate that if people have any emotional or psychological issue, they cannot succeed in the workplace or excel in a school environment. The opposite is also true: if someone is not doing well in school or succeeding in their jobs, it's not easy to access the kind of healthcare they may need to stay healthy and happy. Again on the topic of mental health, a TCNJ faculty member suggested that cultural counseling should be considered and integrated in mental health services both at TCNJ and beyond to benefit individuals from different backgrounds (e.g., Latinos, Asian-Americans). This kind of effort could be beneficial, as for example, people may feel more comfortable talking to someone who understands the values of a collectivist culture versus individualistic cultures.

**WEALTH AND INCOME  
INEQUALITY ACROSS THE  
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BEHALF OF WEALTH  
ACQUISITION IN OUR  
COUNTRY.**





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## KEY THEMES AND STORIES

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### GENDER

A powerful story was shared by a TCNJ student, who spoke about his transgender experience. He openly discussed the kind of support and resources that are needed to help guide this important transition. This story also highlighted the importance of family support. As an example, the student discussed that he is fortunate that his mother is fully employed so he can have access to health insurance and the medications he needs during his transition. He also spoke about the importance of mental health support and services, both on campus and off-campus, in this important phase of his life.

### LANGUAGE

Addressing language barriers in healthcare settings was another important topic from the community discussion. Many times, individuals who immigrate to the United States do not speak English and therefore do not have the means to communicate with their doctors and healthcare providers. One particular student spoke about the experiences and challenges of her own mother who found herself in this situation many times. In the student's opinion, this illustrates the need for ensuring diversity in clinical settings and recruiting more bilingual healthcare providers in hospitals and clinical practices.

### UNEMPLOYMENT

Other audience members discussed mental health as it relates to unemployment and highlighted the importance of minimizing job loss in our community. One suggestion was that we support local businesses to reduce unemployment within less established and renowned companies. For example, a TCNJ student mentioned that her father is an electrician in the area and that supporting smaller businesses can encourage job growth as well as community well-being. Other members of the audience emphasized the connection of mental health to unemployment. We must recognize the effects of job loss on our overall well-being and happiness in order to work towards new solutions and invest in services to address mental health issues.



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## CONCLUSIONS

This film screening and interactive community discussion event was an incredible opportunity for everyone involved to learn, inform, and share stories. Community engagement events such as this showcase the importance of storytelling in encouraging dialogue and identifying community-driven solutions to health and social issues, as well as fostering connection, empathy, and compassion among participants. This event brought a sense of awareness among all attendees on the many factors that influence health outcomes by allowing students, faculty, community residents and other participants to come together and speak on crucial issues that affect their community. The role of community partners and students in facilitating this kind of process is very important. Our brief introductory panel, which brought together students and community partners, was an essential tool to frame the discussion. Moreover, with the guidance of community partners and faculty members, students were able to complete a comprehensive discussion guide and gain new insights and perspectives that helped them facilitate the discussion with the event's attendees. Faculty-led rehearsal sessions were also key to make sure students felt confident and well-prepared during the event. The comprehensive publicity and social media campaign implemented by the students helped ensure a good turnout. Overall, the event embodied respect and compassion, and provided TCNJ and its surrounding geographical community with a forum to share their own personal experiences, and hopefully to start becoming engaged on advancing health equity and other important human rights issues.



**THIS EVENT HELPED STRENGTHEN THE BONDS BETWEEN TCNJ AND OUR SURROUNDING COMMUNITY, BRINGING TOGETHER PEOPLE WITH VARYING EXPERIENCES. IT HELPED SHOW EVERYONE HOW BENEFICIAL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND DIALOGUE CAN BE, AND INSPIRED PARTICIPANTS TO SHARE THEIR STORIES AND ENGAGE PEOPLE IN THEIR OWN COMMUNITIES.**

