

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Impact of engagement in the Community Champions program on clinical nursing practice

Sarah Badlis, Ella Poole, Hayley Siegle, Sherilyn Tyburski, Terri H. Lipman*

School of Nursing, University of Pennsylvania, United States

Received: October 22, 2022

Accepted: January 4, 2023

Online Published: February 1, 2023

DOI: 10.5430/jnep.v13n5p1

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5430/jnep.v13n5p1>

ABSTRACT

Student organizations focused on community engagement are a way to prepare nursing students to meet the needs of diverse populations in clinical practice. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the impact that the Community Champions program, an example of a community engagement organization, has on clinical practice amongst alumnae who have participated in the program. A survey was distributed via email to alumnae of Community Champions who have graduated in the past 4 years. Respondents indicated that they were able to translate skills learned in the Community Champions program, such as community awareness, patient interaction, and teamwork, and were able to identify examples of how skills were used in practice. Those who do not currently participate in community engagement cited lack of time and knowledge of community opportunities as limitations for volunteering. These data support that student community engagement provides skills relevant to professional nursing practice and has implications for strategies to promote community engagement among nurses.

Key Words: Community engagement, Nursing education, Clinical practice

1. INTRODUCTION

Nurses have a commitment to their communities beyond the bedside.^[1] Community engagement is an opportunity for nurses to collaboratively expand the focus from single health issues to a range of social, economic, political, and environmental factors that affect health in the community, otherwise known as social determinants of health.^[2] Minority populations that constitute almost half of the U.S. population have disproportionately higher rates of premature death, obesity, heart disease, and other chronic diseases.^[3] Coupled with the COVID-19 pandemic that has exacerbated the striking health disparities of each minority group, there is a need now more than ever to incorporate community engagement into healthcare delivery. Research has shown that to address health disparities, interventions must decrease or eliminate gaps in healthcare access, socioeconomic status,

health literacy, and social determinants of health.^[4,5] It is essential to integrate community engagement into nursing curricula to prepare nursing students to provide optimal care to marginalized communities and to improve community health and raise awareness for these issues among nurses. There is a call for the incorporation of community engagement into nursing programs to produce healthier communities.^[6] Nursing students incorporate nursing skills when engaging with families, demonstrating evidence-based practices in providing care to patients and families.^[7] Engaging in health screenings and education at schools in the community leads to positive educational outcomes among nursing students, with an improvement in health promotion scores on the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX), the nursing licensing exam. Students stated that participation in their community clinical experiences had a positive impact

*Correspondence: Terri H. Lipman; Email: lipman@upenn.edu; Address: School of Nursing, University of Pennsylvania, United States.

when responding to questions in this section of the exam.^[8] Moreover, community members enjoy interacting with the students, viewing these experiences as an avenue toward improving health-related services for the community.^[9,10]

1.1 Program overview

In 2014, the University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing developed the Community Champions program, a student-run, faculty-mentored service-learning organization, for students to gain a better understanding of Philadelphia's communities and to promote population health in a variety of settings.^[11] As quoted on the Penn Nursing website, the mission of Community Champions is "to enhance the educational experience of Penn Nursing students by providing meaningful opportunities for learning to address the social determinants of health through community engagement - and by doing so, affect positive changes in health and wellness in the members of the community."^[12] With the direction of student leaders, over 50 students are matched to community sites each year, serving as "Community Champions" in the forms of educators, mentors, or providers. Student roles, derived from community needs and priorities, include developing health education materials for inner-city public-school students, teaching infant CPR to parents of infants who are being discharged from a neonatal intensive care unit, and serving as companions and support for elders with memory loss and their caregivers. Students can engage in their areas of interest while fulfilling a variety of needs in Philadelphia. Data have shown that the Community Champions program has strengthened the relationship between the community and the university and provided new health-related services to community members.^[10] During the COVID-19 pandemic, Community Champions collaborated with community sites to convert engagement to an online platform, in addition to developing new sites to reflect the ever-changing situation.^[13]

Past research demonstrated that Community Champions had a substantial impact in preparing nursing students for clinical practice, enhancing their motivation for service and influencing their career trajectories.^[14] Community Champions strives to produce leaders in the community, translating the skills they have acquired into clinical practice. This is consistent with research, which revealed that Registered Nurses, Nurse Practitioners, and Licensed Practical Nurses who had a high sense of community engagement and belonging were more likely to have higher level positions and a high satisfaction with nursing practice.^[15] Additionally, Registered Nurses were more likely to transfer from hospital-based to community-based clinical roles after favorable community health experiences.^[16] To this point, there are limited data on how community engagement in nursing school influences

professional nursing practice. The purpose of this study was to survey alumnae of Community Champions to evaluate how the program has impacted clinical practice.

2. METHODS

2.1 Sample

A database of alumnae of Community Champions was reviewed by the investigator (SB) to identify those former students who had 1) completed at least one semester of Community Champions engagement and 2) graduated between 2018 and 2021 or was a past student leader of Community Champions. Potential study participants were identified by analyzing spreadsheets kept by past site leaders of Community Champions in the files of the organization. Using these criteria, 110 alumnae of Community Champions were identified as eligible to participate.

2.2 Data collection

The Community Champions impact survey was developed through Qualtrics. Questions were structured based on the goals of the project: 1) to learn where alumnae are currently practicing and 2) to understand their experience with Community Champions and its perceived impact on clinical practice after graduation. Survey questions were based on prior work in similar studies and from resources from the Netter Center for Community Partnerships.^[17] Content validity was confirmed by TL, an expert in student volunteerism and community engagement.

Data were collected through survey questions using multiple choice, Likert scale, and open-ended questions. Multiple choice questions were utilized for demographic analysis and Community Champions engagement assessments, such as employment, education, year of graduation, volunteer sites, and years involved in Community Champions. Participants were asked to identify their motive for participating in Community Champions and to evaluate statements about community engagement and rate them on the Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Finally, participants were asked to select the skills gained from Community Champions and the skills used in clinical practice because of Community Champions, with an opportunity to provide examples of how skills translated into practice via text boxes. The list of skills was generated by the mission statement of the Community Champions program.^[12]

The Penn Nursing Alumni Engagement Team disseminated the survey in March 2022 via email to the 110 alumnae of Community Champions identified. A follow-up email was sent to the alumnae one week later. Only completed surveys were included in the analysis.

2.3 Data analysis

For quantitative data, frequencies of multiple-choice questions were computed and compiled into tables and graphs. For the open-ended statements, the authors met to select quotes that best highlighted a connection between Community Champions and clinical practice and to identify themes among the respondents' motives to pursue Community Champions.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Community engagement

The survey was completed by 17 individuals (15% response rate). As shown in Table 1, there was representation from each graduating class year, with most (n = 11) graduating

over three years ago. Involvement in Community Champions ranged from less than one year to all four years of their undergraduate careers, with a mode of three years. All respondents are practicing as nurses in some capacity, and many (n = 8) are currently pursuing further education. When asked if involved in community engagement outside of their professional roles, 35% of the respondents indicated yes, from informal volunteering to mentoring to continuing their volunteering at their former Community Champions sites. Out of the motives for participating in Community Champions identified by participants, 11 mentioned the word "community."

Each initiative was consolidated into a group according to categories listed on the Community Champions homepage, as seen in Figures 1 and 2.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of respondents

Years since graduation	Greater than or equal to 3 years (n = 11)	Less than 3 years (n = 6)
Years in Community Champions:		
4 years	1	2
3 years	4	2
2 years	2	0
1 year	3	1
Less than 1 year	1	1
Involvement with Community Outside of Practicing Role:		
Yes	5	1
No	6	5
Practicing Role:*		
Registered Nurse	10	6
Nurse Manager	1	0
Nurse Practitioner	1	0
Degree Pursuing:		
Master of Science in Nursing (MSN)	3	2
Doctorate of Nursing Practice (DNP)	3	0

*Respondents can select more than one practicing role.

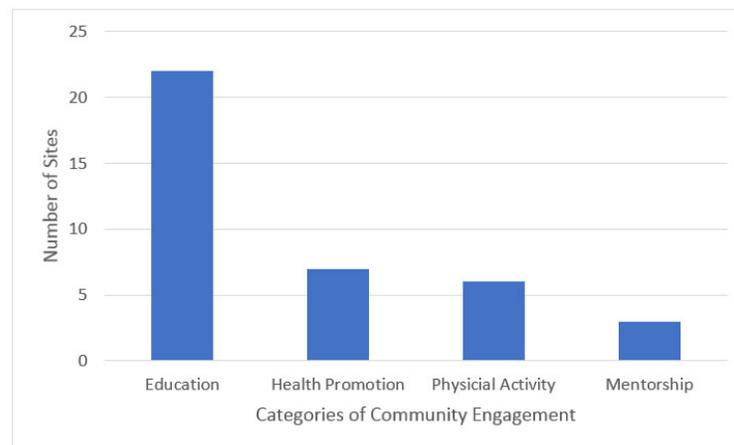


Figure 1. Number of initiatives offered by the Community Champions program by category

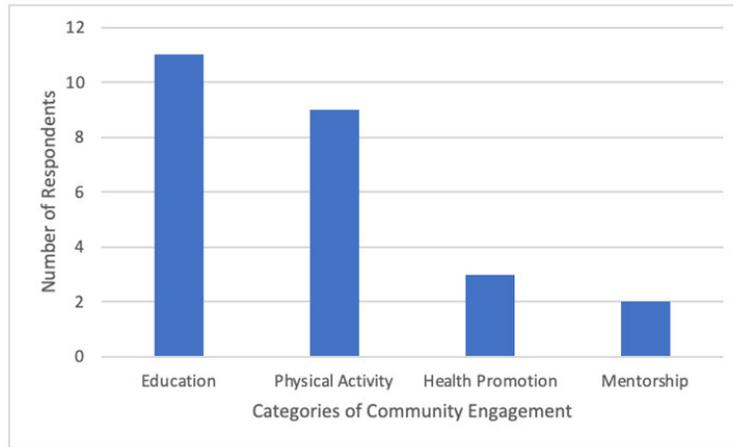


Figure 2. Number of respondents who participated in each category of community engagement initiatives

Most respondents participated in education and physical activities followed by health promotion and mentorship, resembling a trend that coincides with the number of initiatives in each category.

3.2 Clinical skills

Respondents were asked the skill(s) gained from participating in Community Champions, followed by the skills that were implemented in clinical practice, as shown in Figure 3.

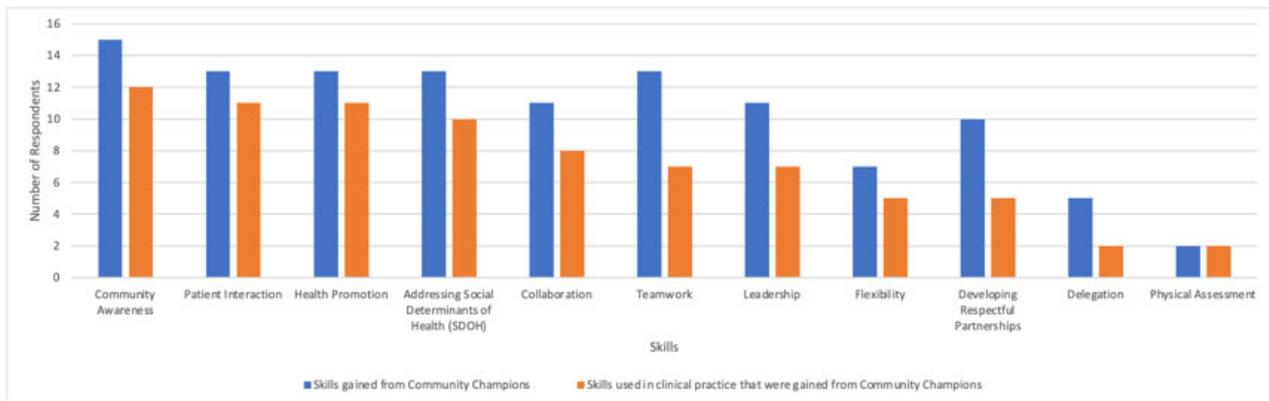


Figure 3. Reported skills gained by participants during the Community Champions program and their use in post-graduate clinical practice

Respondents were then asked to describe how they implemented each skill they learned in Community Champions into their current practice, as shown in Table 2.

4. DISCUSSION

These data supported that student community engagement provided a diverse range of skills relevant to professional nursing practice. All respondents indicated that they have acquired at least one skill from Community Champions, and each skill gained from Community Champions has translated to clinical practice. Community Awareness, Patient Interaction, Teamwork, and Health Promotion were among the top skills acquired from participation in Community Champions and translated into clinical practice. The results are consistent

with prior research. Students gain teamwork skills such as communication, delegation, and negotiation, as well as exposure to the realities of health care access, through community engagement.^[18] Increases in self-perceived competencies, such as understanding, communication, and community service, were demonstrated in nursing students after participating in one community event.^[19] In a study by Kulig et al. (2018), social determinants of health and patient communication skills increased after nursing students participated in a primarily community engagement-based nursing course.^[20] *In 2015, the “Year of Ethics,” the American Nurses Association extended their Code of Ethics to include that a nurse must be an advocate for their patients, promote health and wellbeing, collaborate with fellow healthcare professionals,

and display respect by considering patients' needs and values into care.^[21] Thus, it is critical for nursing students to align

with the values of the nursing profession, and community engagement participation is an effective method to acquire these niche skills.

Table 2. Examples of each skill used in clinical practice

Skill	Example Quotes
Community Awareness	"Have a better understanding of what [patients'] needs are and how they can be met in the community."
Patient Interaction	"My time as a community champion makes it easier to talk to patients and families in my current role." "As a nursing student getting comfortable in the provider role comes with time. Being part of CC gave me an intro to that."
Health Promotion	"Because of the teaching provided to new parents at baby friendly, I feel more comfortable going over discharge education with patients and promoting healthy behaviors."
Teamwork	"Teamwork is a huge part of working in an ICU knowing who and when to depend on them just like coordinating activities in CC."
Addressing Social Determinants of Health	"I feel more comfortable discussing patient's home life outside of the hospital and addressing identified SDOH by looping in social work/case management and also connecting patients to community resources." "Gained exposure and a better understanding for SDOH and implemented initiatives that allowed better access and sustainable solutions to address the SDOH."
Collaboration	"Collaborating with different team members to ensure that we can work together toward one goal."
Leadership	"Led students and organized initiatives helped ability to contribute as a leader in the clinical setting with patient care and unit based initiatives."
Flexibility	"Learned the importance of being flexible and making self available to accommodate others in order to have a successful initiative."
Developing Respectful Partnerships	"Constant communication and feedback within initiative leaders and volunteers."
Physical Assessment	"Gained experience assessing patients to astutely identify changes in physical assessment."
Delegation	"Delegation is a huge part of nursing, working in a team setting is a continued skill."

A total of 35% of respondents have sought community engagement opportunities outside of their clinical practice. The literature supports that most nurses are committed to improving the health of their communities by participating in both nursing-related and non-nursing-related activities outside of work.^[1, 22, 23] In this study, those who were not involved in community engagement cited time constraints as a limiting factor, a barrier that has been cited by nurses who could not seek after-work continuing education programs.^[24] Many nurses participate in non-job-related volunteer activities, but the fear instilled by the uncertainty of the COVID-19 virus was a barrier for healthcare volunteers during the pandemic.^[25] Further research delving into reasons behind hesitancy in community engagement participation among nurses will provide additional data on current barriers to volunteering. Therefore, this research supports the need for easier access to community engagement and volunteer opportunities in the workplace.

In the future, the Community Champions program could

develop approaches to identifying engagement opportunities, regardless of location, to graduating nursing students and alumnae to ease the transition. There was no association between the likelihood of participating in community engagement and the number of years in Community Champions. Interestingly, four of the six respondents who are involved in community engagement are currently pursuing higher education. This finding aligns with the research by Rewakowski, Atav, Clancy, & MacPherson (2021) and Smith, Schlozman, Verba, & Brady (2009) that demonstrated that nurses with advanced education have higher levels of engagement.^[22, 26] Further studies should evaluate the elements of nursing education that are linked to a greater motivation for community engagement.

A limitation of this study is the low response rate. However, the response rate of 15% is not atypical; a meta-analysis found that response rates in online surveys are 11% lower than in other types of surveys.^[27] These surveys were distributed to the preferred emails identified by respondents

when they graduated, which may have changed since. With more time and resources, such as monetary rewards for completing the survey and individually contacting respondents, we speculate that the response rate would be higher. Regardless, the overall praise the program has received from these individuals should not be undermined.

5. CONCLUSION

Engagement in the Community Champions program embedded nursing students into initiatives in the Philadelphia area and emphasized communication and collaboration with marginalized, high-risk populations that will transfer to clinical practice when caring for patients. The Community Champions program has provided opportunities for nursing students to explore skills that will translate into clinical practice, addressing the national call by the Future of Nursing 2020-

2030 report for a diverse nursing workforce equipped to address social determinants of health and increase health equity.^[28] As future nurses, the Community Champions program prepares students for interactions with diverse patient populations within an under resourced inner-city community.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank our community partners and the Netter Center for Community Partnerships, University of Pennsylvania for their support. We are especially grateful to our Community Champions' alumnae for their participation in this study and their commitment to improving the lives of marginalized community members.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST DISCLOSURE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

REFERENCES

- [1] McCollum M, Kovner CT, Ojemeni MT, et al. Nurses Improve Their Communities' Health Where They Live, Learn, Work, and Play. *Policy, Politics, & Nursing Practice*. 2017; 18(1): 7–16. PMID:28558516 <https://doi.org/10.1177/1527154417698142>
- [2] Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (2015). What Is Community Engagement? Available from: https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/communityengagement/pce_what.html
- [3] National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. *Communities in Action: Pathways to Health Equity*. 2017. <https://doi.org/10.17226/24624>
- [4] Skolarus LE, Sharrief A, Gardener H, et al. Considerations in Addressing Social Determinants of Health to Reduce Racial/Ethnic Disparities in Stroke Outcomes in the United States. *Stroke*. 2020; 51(11): 3433-3439. <https://doi.org/10.1161/STROKEAHA.120.030426>
- [5] Mannoh I, Hussien M, Commodore-Mensah Y, et al. Impact of social determinants of health on cardiovascular disease prevention. *Current Opinion in Cardiology*. 2021; 36(5): 572-579. PMID:34397464 <https://doi.org/10.1097/HCO.0000000000000893>
- [6] Darcy-Mahoney A, Carter B, Green K, et al. Looking backwards to move forward: Using a social mission lens in nursing education. *Journal of Professional Nursing: Official Journal of the American Association of Colleges of Nursing*. 2020; 36(5): 412–416. PMID:33039077 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.profnurs.2020.03.005>
- [7] Horning ML, Ostrow L, Beierwaltes P, et al. Service learning within community-engaged research: Facilitating nursing student learning outcomes. *Journal of Professional Nursing*. 2020; 36(6): 510-513. PMID:33308548 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.profnurs.2020.04.005>
- [8] Montgomery M, Johnson P. Increasing Nursing Students' Knowledge of Health Promotion Through Community Engagement. *Pedagogy in Health Promotion*. 2015; 1(3): 153-157. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2373379915577964>
- [9] Quinn BL, Ghaziri ML, Knight M. Incorporating Social Justice, Community Partnerships, and Student Engagement in Community Health Nursing Courses. *Teaching and Learning in Nursing*. 2019; 14(3): 183-185. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.teln.2019.02.006>
- [10] Hausman-Cohen S, Asamoah N, Yee C, et al. Community organizations' perspectives on the impact of a nursing student-led academic-community partnership program. *Journal of Nursing Education and Practice*. 2020; 10(8): 9-15. <https://doi.org/10.5430/jnep.v10n8p9>
- [11] Mintz SR, Low CA, McCurry IJ, et al. The Community Champions Program at the University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing. *Journal of Nursing Education and Practice*. 2017; 7(8): 46-50. <https://doi.org/10.5430/jnep.v7n8p46>
- [12] Penn Nursing (n.d.). Community Champions: About Us. Available from: <https://www.nursing.upenn.edu/community-champions/about-us/>
- [13] Flores DD, Bocage C, Devlin S, et al. When community immersion becomes distance learning: Lessons learned from a disrupted semester. *Pedagogy in Health Promotion*. 2021; 7(1): 1-5. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2373379920963596>
- [14] Benson CE, Feinberg J, Abdallah A, et al. Community champions: A mixed methods study on volunteer recruitment and retention in community engagement. *Journal of Nursing Education and Practice*. 2020; 10(6): 19-25. <https://doi.org/10.5430/jnep.v10n6p19>
- [15] Danet Lapiz-Bluhm M, Woosley T. Community Service Learning: Effects on Student Nurses' Clinical and Cultural Proficiency Skills. *Journal of Nursing Practice Applications & Review of Research*. 2013; 3(1): 4-14. Available from: https://mypnaa.wildapricot.org/resources/Documents/JNPARR/Issues/Vol3issue1/Vol3issue1_abstract1.pdf
- [16] Steffy ML. Community health learning experiences that influence RN to BSN students interests in community/public health nursing. *Public Health Nursing*. 2019; 36(6): 863–871. PMID:31596026 <https://doi.org/10.1111/phn.12670>
- [17] Sues GEL. University of Pennsylvania ABCS Penn Student Post Semester Survey [Measurement instrument]. Available from: https://sasupenn.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_7PuekdMvC7id6iF
- [18] Davis JH, Robbins C, Maurer D. Facilitating volunteer community engagement service. *The Journal of Nursing Education*. 2020; 59(3): 166-168. PMID:32130420 <https://doi.org/10.3928/01484834-20200220-09>

- [19] Schroeder K, Garcia B, Phillips RS, et al. Addressing Social Determinants of Health Through Community Engagement: An Undergraduate Nursing Course. *The Journal of Nursing Education*. 2019; 58(7): 423–426. PMID:31242312 <https://doi.org/10.3928/01484834-20190614-07>
- [20] Kulig JC, Townshend I, Kosteniuk J, et al. Perceptions of sense of community and community engagement among rural nurses: Results of a national survey. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*. 2018; 88: 60–70. PMID:30199840 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijnurstu.2018.07.018>
- [21] American Nurses Association. Code of Ethics for Nurses with Interpretive Statements. 2015. Available from: <https://www.nursingworld.org/coe-view-only>
- [22] Rewakowski C, Atav S, Clancy H, et al. Civic Engagement in Nursing: Measuring Participation, Reflecting on Influences, and Harnessing Momentum. *Journal of Community Health Nursing*. 2021; 38(3): 161–172. PMID:34148431 <https://doi.org/10.1080/07370016.2021.1932954>
- [23] James, C. (2017). Nurse Volunteer Activities Improve the Health of their Communities, Workforce Study Says. NYU. Available from: <https://www.nyu.edu/about/news-publications/news/2017/march/nurse-volunteer-activities-improve-the-health-of-their-communiti.html>
- [24] Marion S. Nurses' Barriers to Learning: An Integrative Review. *Journal for Nurses in Staff Development*. 2012; 28(4): 182–185. PMID:22821021 <https://doi.org/10.1097/NND.0B013E31825DFB60>
- [25] AlOmar RS, AlShamlan NA, AlAmer NA, et al. What are the barriers and facilitators of volunteering among healthcare students during the COVID-19 pandemic? A Saudi-based cross-sectional study. *BMJ open*. 2021; 11(2): e042910. PMID:33602709 <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2020-042910>
- [26] Smith A, Schlozman KL, Verba S, et al. The Current State of Civic Engagement in America. Pew Research Center. 2009; 13–23. Available from: <https://www.pewinternet.org/2009/09/01/the-current-state-of-civic-engagement-in-america/>
- [27] Manfreda KL, Bosnjak M, Berzelak J, et al. Web surveys versus other survey modes: A meta-analysis comparing response rates. *International Journal of Market Research*. 2008; 50: 79–104. <https://doi.org/10.1177/147078530805000107>
- [28] National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. *The Future of Nursing 2020-2030: Charting a Path to Achieve Health Equity*. Washington, D.C: National Academies Press. 2021. <https://doi.org/10.17226/25982>