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From: Missouri Area Health Education Centers

Creating Partnerships through Service, Community Engagement, and Reflection

The academic-community partnerships built into the Area Health Education Center mission allow Missouri AHECs to foster a culture of service and connection among students and community members with whom we work across the healthcare workforce pipeline. Future health professionals can gain a deeper, more informed perspective on the challenges that communities face in terms of access to resources and systemic obstacles, especially in terms of health care and the social determinants of health.

One way AHECs encourage deeper models of service is through older generations mentoring younger. AHECs form relationships with practicing professionals who precept health professions students; coordinate with health professions faculty who educate students; and provide health careers exploration and health education in local schools and communities. AHECs are unique structures in which to create longer term and community-informed partnerships with a greater chance of addressing community need in sustainable ways.

Manifestations of this approach are long-term community-integration, service distinction, and fellowship programs that become imbedded within health professions programs and supported through AHEC students and staff over time. Examples include the Rodney M. Coe Distinction in Community Service at SLU AHEC in Family and Community Medicine, The MU AHEC's Community Integration Program for Rural Track clerkship students, and the Medical Education Fellows Program at ATSU-KCOM AHEC. Within AHEC-supported community engagement programs, critical reflection on service is a key component. Students reflect through specific journaling questions that ask them to write about the personal insights they developed as they engaged with others, and what future actions those experiences inspired. Culminating community projects, for which students have partnered with a community-serving organization, are often a key feature as well.

Throughout Missouri AHEC regions, this multigenerational mentoring in service has manifested through comprehensive efforts in community dental education and HPV prevention. In Northwest Missouri, a medical student completing AHEC rotations founded an exercise class, now ten years old, in the community for senior men. A high school student in the same AHEC region founded the Maryville High School Running Club, which meets two-three times per week and uses a love of running to teach health, nutrition, fitness, and goal-setting. In the East Central Missouri AHEC region, two SLU medical students teamed up in 2014 to create the Mental Health Awareness Coalition, an educational support group in a local Saint Louis public school. The pilot program provided accurate information to high school students on mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and suicidality, and used the near-peer support of medical students to destigmatize reaching out for support. Today, this program lives on in the same district.



SLU AHEC first year students who work with Saint Louis Public School Vashon High School students on mental health awareness.

AHEC is a partnership of seven locally-governed organizations and three university-based health professions education programs working statewide to increase the numbers of Missouri youth entering stable, high-paying jobs as healthcare professionals and the numbers of professionals caring for underserved populations.

The MAHEC partners include:

- A.T. Still University –
 - Kirksville
- University of Missouri –
 - Columbia
- Saint Louis University
- Northeast Missouri AHEC –Kirksville
- Northwest Missouri AHEC
 - St. Joseph
- West Central Missouri
 - AHEC – Lexington
- Mid-Missouri AHEC – Rolla
- East Central Missouri AHEC– St. Louis
- Southeastern Missouri AHEC – Poplar Bluff
- Southwest Missouri AHEC
 - Springfield