

Human Rights and Social Justice Scholars Program

Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai

Curriculum developed by: HRSJ student leadership (2011-2020)

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Title: Human Rights and Social Justice Scholars Program

Mission: The Human Rights and Social Justice Scholars program aims to provide students who are interested in social justice and health equity work with the resources, knowledge, mentorship, and service opportunities to become successful physician advocates. The comprehensive curriculum encourages students to explore the various ways in which social justice work can be incorporated into their future careers, and includes weekly coursework, longitudinal mentorship opportunities, required service learning engagements, and career series talks/networking events.

Curriculum objectives: By the end of their first year, students will:

- Gain the knowledge, skill sets, and experience to feel confident using their influence as medical students and future physicians to advocate for social justice and health equity issues and to stand against injustice when they witness it
- Meet potential mentors who have successfully incorporated social justice work into their field, and engage in near-peer mentorship in order to create a community with other students interested in advocacy work.
- Engage in experiential, community-based learning experiences within a variety of social justice areas (immigration, LGBTQ rights, prison justice, etc.) and acquire a sense of what issues they are most passionate about and how other physicians have incorporated these issues into their work.

Primary audience: The primary audience of this program is first-year medical students

Curriculum duration: The curriculum takes one year to complete but can be adapted to one semester as necessary

Educational modalities: Educational modalities utilized in this curriculum include:

- One semester of weekly lectures/seminars
- One year of Service Learning Engagements within the community
- Longitudinal educational mentorship and community building

Learner assessment: Students in the HRSJ program are not formally assessed but are expected to attend the Health and Human Rights course in the Fall of their first year, as

well as complete their required Service Learning Engagements over the course of their first year.

Program outcome assessment: Student feedback on course content is collected at the end of the year and at the completion of the Service Learning Engagements

Curriculum last updated: The curriculum was last updated in Summer, 2020

Curriculum:

Health, Human Rights, and Advocacy Nexus Course Syllabus Fall 2020

Created in 2011, this semester-long student-run course is intended to provide students with a space for building critical thinking and community around social justice work. It is required for all members of the Human Rights and Social Justice Scholars (HRSJ) program and open to all students. The course goals are to examine how social processes influence health; to provide a forum for thinking critically about a variety of health and human rights issues; and to empower students to improve local and global health systems.

Week 1: Race, Racism, and Medicine: A Living Legacy

This class will teach students about the role that race and racism play in medicine and other systems. In addition, the class will give students some starting points for how they can engage with and deconstruct these racist systems.

Facilitator:

BIPOC community organizer

Week 2: Healthcare System

This session will introduce students to the many sources of healthcare that exist outside the hospital and will encourage students to think about where healthcare is provided and why. Students will learn about the structures within the current healthcare landscape.

Facilitator:

- *Assistant Professor in Family Medicine and Community Health and Senior Vice President and Chief Medical Officer of Population Health*

Week 3: LGBTQ+ Health Advocacy

Students will hear from three medical professionals and LGBTQ+ health activists on their advocacy work as a family doctor, geriatrician, and transgender health specialist and program director at the Center for Transgender Medicine and Surgery. Students will discuss homophobia and transphobia in the medical system and developments in providing queer-positive, trans-positive, intersectional medical care.

Panelists:

- *Assistant Professor in Family Medicine and Community Health*
- *Transgender Health Specialist and Program Director of Center for Transgender Medicine and Surgery*

Week 4: Gun Violence

This session will ask students to participate in a discussion on the epidemiology of gun violence and to engage with relevant literature on the topic. Students will discuss the health effects of exposure to violence and brainstorm possible medical and community-level interventions.

Facilitator:

- *MD, MPH, Pediatrics and Environmental Health*

Week 5: Housing and Homelessness

This class will engage students with information about the changing East Harlem neighborhood and the importance of zip code. In addition, students will learn about individuals who are experiencing homelessness and the unique challenges in providing healthcare to this population.

Facilitator:

- *MD, Internal Medicine*

Week 6: Childhood Trauma and Sexual Violence

This session will introduce students to the many pathways through which childhood trauma affects health. Through the lens of sexual violence and sex trafficking, it will focus on ways to integrate trauma-informed care into medical practice.

Facilitators:

- MD, *Emergency Medicine*

Week 7: Substance Use, Addiction, and Harm Reduction

In this class, students will compare and contrast the different responses to the crack and opioid epidemics as well as the impacts of each on East Harlem. This class will seek to make connections between past and present epidemics. In addition, students will think about how medicine deals with substance abuse and whether it does a good job of doing so.

Facilitators:

- *The Bureau of Alcohol and Drug Use Prevention, Care and Treatment at the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene*

Week 8: Refugee & Migrant Health

Students will learn about what medical resources are available for people who have recently immigrated to the United States and about the significant barriers they still face. They will learn how physicians can advocate for their immigrant patients.

Facilitator:

- *Executive Director, Libertas Center for Human Rights, Elmhurst Hospital Center*

Week 9: Incarceration, Health, and HIV Care

This class will discuss healthcare within the incarceration system, learning more about mass incarceration in New York City, the issue of dual loyalty as a physician, and providing HIV care to people in the criminal justice system.

Facilitator:

- MD, *Infectious Diseases, Associate Executive Director in the Division of Correctional Health Services, NYC Health + Hospitals*

Week 10: Wrapping Up and the Role of the Physician

For our final session, students will reflect on the role of the physician in dismantling structural inequity and human rights abuses. Students will be asked to read an article and then engage in a discussion on the opportunities and limitations of continuing this work as a clinician, as well as the challenges of incorporating these values into a career.

Facilitator Guide:

Optional debrief led by second-year medical students following each class session.

1. Open with community-building ice-breaker:
 - a. Ask students to share one good thing about their previous day/week, one recent challenging moment, and one thing they are looking forward to (Often called: Rose-Bud-Thorn or Highs and Lows)
2. What were your initial reactions to last night's class? Was anything surprising or unexpected?
3. What aspects of the presentation resonated with you? What did you disagree with?
4. How did last night's discussion frame the topic in a way you found helpful? Were there any moments in its framing that you found unhelpful or incongruous with something else you may have learned elsewhere?
5. What questions do you still have about the topic presented?
6. What are some key takeaways from the presentation to center in your future practice?

Service Learning Engagements:

Service Learning Engagements (SLEs) are loosely defined as any experience outside of required class time that contributes to a student's understanding of the ways in which social justice work can be incorporated into their careers. SLEs are an opportunity to engage with local social justice organizations and better understand what activism looks like both within and outside of the institution. Students are provided access to a shared google calendar that is updated regularly by group leadership with information about meetings and events at a variety of community organizations and Mount Sinai-associated groups engaging in social justice work. Each student is expected to attend two community organization meetings, one Sinai-sponsored lecture, and one

non-Sinai event based on their personal interests. At the end of the semester, students participate in a debrief, sharing their experiences attending these meetings, lectures, and events. We hope that by attending these community meetings and events students will find organizations they want to engage with more deeply and continue to seek out opportunities for advocacy and volunteer work within those organizations in the future. Examples might include attending an East Harlem Community Health Committee Meeting, a Mount Sinai Medical Ethics talk, an event phone banking for an Eviction Moratorium, or a local Civil Rights Union Meeting.

Mentorship Opportunities:

Mentorship opportunities in the Mount Sinai Human Rights Program are broken into two categories, and students are encouraged to take advantage of both.

1. Near Peer Mentorship: All first-year students are paired with a second-year student who was in the previous year's HRSJ cohort. Students connect at the beginning and end of the semester, and touch base as needed throughout the semester. Mentors help students settle into medical school, connect students with potential faculty mentors and opportunities, and answer questions about school, advocacy, and research, among other topics.
2. Professional Mentorship: First-year students are paired with mentors, who are physicians in the Mount Sinai Health System that engage with advocacy through some aspect of their work. Mentors are expected to help guide students in whatever direction they need, helping connect them to research opportunities, shadowing, or other physicians in fields they hope to explore. Mentors also help students flesh out their own potential career paths at the intersection of medicine and advocacy. Students and mentors are encouraged to attend a conference together, which can be reimbursed.

Community-building

Building a sense of community among each first-year cohort is an integral part of the HRSJ experience. It allows students to make connections with other aspiring physician-activists, build coalitions and partnerships across a variety of interests and areas of advocacy, and feel a sense of comfort and safety among their peers. In a normal year, community forms passively as students attend weekly dinners before the HRSJ course and engage in SLEs together, as well as through active programming, most notably a Fall Retreat, which is students' first opportunity in their first semester of medical school to process their feelings while removed from campus. The Fall Retreat consists of a weekend away from campus (usually at an AirBnB) during which students

are given time to relax and get to know their peers in a setting outside of medical school, as well as engage in organized group discussions and self-reflections on topics related to health equity and justice. Due to limitations to in-person gatherings during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, we pivoted towards more online engagement, such as Zoom happy hours, as well as a “Retreat from Zoom” in lieu of our Fall Retreat. This “Retreat from Zoom,” which we structured as a scavenger hunt, encouraged students to get offline for a day in order to recover somewhat from the screen-fatigue they were likely feeling, to speak with their peers on the phone, and reflect on the role of advocacy in medicine with some readings and a brief writing prompt.

Institutional Support

The Mount Sinai Human Rights and Social Justice Scholars Program is led year-to-year by a collection of second-year medical students who apply to serve on the Leadership team following their completion of the first-year curriculum. This student leadership is supplemented by institutional support from the Icahn School of Medicine and the Mount Sinai Health System, which have supported the program logistically and financially since it’s conception in a number of ways:

- The Human Rights and Social Justice Course is approved as a registered elective course for medical students by the Icahn School of Medicine and successful completion of the course results in an official listing on students’ transcripts.
- The Human Rights and Social Justice Program receives annual financial support from the Department of Medical Education to support mentor/mentee conference travel.
- The Human Rights and Social Justice Program student leadership team receives guidance, advising, and logistical support from a faculty advisor with a long history of community-based public health practice and research who also serves as the Associate Dean for Diversity & Inclusion in the Mount Sinai Health System Office for Diversity & Inclusion.