Being a STUDENT in the Age of COVID-19

As the world has come to a screeching halt, we’ve seen the dawn of a new era regarding the student experience. As universities have moved to online formats and buildings have been left empty, we, as a university, have been facing unprecedented circumstances. For many students, this means a transition out of the classroom and into our homes, either in Houston or across the US, as we learn with our professors how to make this change. For others, it has been the loss of normalcy, and a new challenge to find ways to complete degrees without access to clinicals and patients. For many, a senior year that was supposed to be full of celebration and graduation has now turned to one of uncertainty as students begin to enter a job market that has been drastically altered.

While for many, the future has now become uncertain, we believe now is the time to look out into our community and salute those that are called to the front as essential workers. For those students that are on the front lines, either as healthcare professionals or public health professionals, know that we admire you and we can’t thank you enough for all that you have done in this global climate. And to our faculty and staff who have been working tirelessly, we thank you for all that you do and all that you continue to do in this great fight!

Tristen Tellman, GSBS

Mental Health and Diversity at SIC

For the past several years the University of Texas System has made mental health a high priority for its students and faculty. In line with this, the Student Inter-Council (SIC) at UTHealth has made it our mission for the past two years to assess the resource's for students on our Houston campus and make recommendations for ways to improve the overall student experience.

In the 2019-2020 academic year, SIC introduced a council initiative to systematically review the mentorship opportunities for students at each of the six UTHealth schools. This initiative, led by both our Mental Health and Diversity committees, has taken an in-depth look at the opportunities available to students at their schools to facilitate either student-student mentorship or student-faculty mentorship outside of the formal advisory role.

In our final report to University leadership, this report will detail all that is currently available to students through their respective school, and aims to provide insight and recommendations for ways to either improve systems that are already in place or establish new systems based on best-of-practice results from these findings.

As students in the health professions, mental health is increasingly important, and we aim to utilize mentorship as an avenue for improving the overall student experience and providing student support.

Tristen Tellman, GSBS
SIC Community Outreach

Star of Hope—Turkey Drive

On November 13th, 2019 the UTHealth Student InterCouncil (SIC) with the assistance of Auxiliary Enterprises conducted a successful Turkey Drive. The Turkey Drive is an opportunity for the SIC Community Outreach Committee to purchase turkeys and donate them to the community kitchen at Star of Hope's Cornerstone Community. This year we were able to donate 30 frozen turkeys!

The community kitchen serves the Women and Family Development Center. This center houses up to 130 families and 160 single women daily and provides programs to help residents break the generational cycle of abuse, neglect and addiction that traps so many single women and families.

The staff were overjoyed and grateful to receive the turkeys as they would help to provide the means to serve their annual Thanksgiving Day dinner. SIC was thankful that we were able to donate during such a meaningful time.

Arlene Cortez, SPH

UTHealthCares—Teddy Bear Clinic

The UTHealthCares Third Annual Community Health Fair took place on January 25 to provide free health screenings for members of Houston's Jensen community. UTHealthCares Health Fair is a collaboration of several UTH entities with the support of UT Physicians, Texas Medical Association, and the Houston Food Bank. At the fair, participants were able to receive screenings and education on the following aspects of care: ophthalmology, vitals, BMI, blood glucose, dental, healthy nutrition, social services information, and cancer prevention. Children were encouraged to come to the health fair with their parents to experience the Teddy Bear clinic. Since many children are apprehensive about seeing doctors, the Teddy Bear clinic allowed children to pick out a bear, put on a white coat, and do medical “examinations” on their new friend. Student InterCouncil donated stuffed animals for the Teddy Bear clinic, and several SIC representatives participated as volunteer as well.

In addition to providing adequate health scare screening, an additional mission of UTHealthCares was to provide essential health education to participants such as eating healthy and exercising regularly. Each participant left with a basic interpretation of their screening results, and an information folder containing aspects discussed at each educational station, an American Heart Association bilingual cookbook with health recipes, sun screen, groceries provided by the Houston Food Bank, and most importantly, motivation and empowerment to improve their health. In total, UTHealthCares Health Fair serviced around 250 participants in the local community, with the help of around 100 student volunteers across all 6 UTHealth schools.

Melissa Yang, MMS

UTPH Toy Drive Brightens up the holidays

In the greater Houston area, some children will be spending their holidays in a hospital or clinical facility struggling to heal from their illness. With the actions of the UTHealth Student InterCouncil Community Outreach Committee and Traci Harris (Auxiliary Enterprises Coordinator), $500.00 was spent at various department stores to donate over 50 toys for all age groups. All donations went to the UT Police at Houston Annual Children’s Gift Drive on December 9th, 2019 to be distributed to children at the Lyndon B. Johnson Hospital, CE Odom Pediatric and Adolescent Health Center, and Harris County Psychiatric Center, just in time for the holiday season.

Rachel Buckley, UTSD

Book Between Kids

Earlier this month SIC’s Community Outreach committee donated over 50 books to the organization Books Between Kids, a local Houston non-profit that provides books for at-risk elementary school students. The children are able to take donated books home to build their own personal libraries.

Unfortunately, around 85% of Houston ISD's elementary-aged children live at or below the poverty line. Research from a 2010 University of Nevada study has shown that children growing up in homes without books, where books are considered a luxury, are less likely to complete a basic education than their peers who do have books available at home.

SIC specifically hand-picked a variety of STEM-focused children's books and is proud to support an organization profoundly helps these Houston children and their families!

Melissa Burgos, SON
SIC Sponsored Events

School of Public Health—Diversity Fair
On February 12, 2020, the UTHealth School of Public Health Student Association (UTH SPHSA) hosted its 11th Annual Diversity Fair. This event allowed students, faculty, staff, friends and family across all the UTHealth schools to come together and “share our similarities and celebrate our differences”. This was achieved through the efforts of the various exhibitors who planned and organized their booths beautifully to represent their culture, country, school or student group. All 24 of the booths did a great job educating the rest of the UTHealth family about their culture, country or student group through posters, demonstrations, games, music, dance or food. The event was catered to provide guests with Chinese, Indian, Turkish, Italian and Spanish food options to enjoy.

In addition to the booths, there was also a 1.5 hour program that gave members of the UTHealth community another chance to represent their culture and celebrate diversity. The program included dances from various regions of the world, including Bollywood dancing and an African pride performance. A few participants also sang, in English or in regional languages, played an instrument or performed poetry. The event was hosted by Brianna Lewis, the Associate Director of UTH SPHSA.

Ankita Podichetty, SPH-SBMI
Brianna A Lewis, SPH

Healthcare Innovation Challenge 2020
The 2nd annual UTHealth Healthcare Innovation Challenge was held on 22nd February, 2020 at the Denton A Cooley center. The 2020 event was successfully organized by three doctoral students at UT Health. This year the teams were required to work over 3 weeks on identifying a novel solution to reduce hospital readmissions. There were 11 teams of students (56 students) from the six UTHealth schools who successfully competed in the competition. Participants and judges also had the opportunity to listen to our lunch lecture by Dr. Kaz Nelson, who spoke about the ethical implications regarding innovation and interprofessionalism.

An overwhelming response from students was their increased ability to work in interprofessional teams after participating in the Healthcare Innovation Challenge. They gained real world skills such as how to perform an effective cost/benefit analysis, address team conflict in a meaningful and professional manner, and express ideas clearly and concisely. Overall, it was an exciting and thrilling event, seeing how students together explored the complexity of innovation, operations, and healthcare to create meaningful solutions.

-Boomadevi Narendran, SPH

AMBR - Navigating Parenthood in Science and Academia
The Association of Minority Biomedical Researchers (AMBR) hosted a teach-in event addressing hurdles of navigating parenthood in science and academia, sponsored by SIC, as part of the “Empowerment in Science” series. This series is designed to inspire students and the GSBS community to engage in discussions about important social justice issues; learn how to navigate them; to be active allies; and find resources.

Overall, all our panelists recommended students to create strong support systems consisting of family or friends who can help with child care and emphasized the importance of having supportive mentors and supervisors who advocate for a work-life balance. Since UT Health’s daycare often has a long waiting list, panelists indicated other options like Bright Horizons and YMCA that might be more affordable. Additionally, students are also eligible for income-based government support programs like the WIC (nutrition program for Women, Infants and Children), food stamps, and Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) or Children’s Medicaid.

The event created a platform for all UT Health students to discuss the challenge that many face balancing career ambitions with family planning.

-Ayesha Khan, GSBS
SIC Finances

Throughout the academic year, the SIC has sponsored 3 projects (Diversity fair, Healthcare Innovation Challenge and Empowerment in Science series), as well as organized two open events to all students of the university (Salutation and Sports Day, the community outreach committee sponsored 4 projects).

Although the SIC had planned more events for the year, we had to cancel few events due to unfortunate events. We hope to start fresh the next academic year with a busy schedule. We hope to numerous events and a bigger crawfish boil.

Sehej Kaur Hara, SPH

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TOTAL EXPENDITURE (Sept 2019 - Mar 2020) $8,249.20

2019-2020 SIC Officers

President: Tristen Tellman, GSBS

Secretary: Micaela Sandoval, SPH

Treasurer: Sehej Kaur Hara, SPH

Historian: Evit John, SPH

Follow us!
Facebook: Student Intercouncil at UTHealth
https://www.facebook.com/UTHealth.SIC

Instagram: uthealthsic

Twitter: @UTHSIC
What is the Student InterCouncil?

The Student InterCouncil (SIC) is the official UTHealth student governance organization and is the recognized forum of student opinion and the primary vehicle for student participation in the governance of UTHealth. The organization is comprised of three representatives from each of the six UTHealth schools and three from underrepresented student groups and three international student constituencies.

The SIC contributes to the quality of student life at UTHealth by participating in the development and implementation of policies and procedures affecting students; providing funds to support special projects of other UTHealth registered student organizations; representing student interests on external and internal committees; improving communication among the schools through the publication of an SIC newsletter- Student Pulse, and planning and implementing activities that encompass all students across UTHealth. Remember that we are here to be your voice, so contact us anytime at sicgov@uth.tmc.edu.

2019-2020 SIC Representatives

Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences
- Tristan Tellman, President
- Jeff Ackroyd, Vice President
- Sonia Patel

School of Nursing
- Alexander Wheeler
- Melissa Burgos
- Paul Emeany

McGovern Medical School
- Niharika Neela
- Rachel Pham
- Melissa Yang

School of Biomedical Informatics
- Ankita Podichetty
- Alexandra Zingg Guzzman
- Michelle Mun

School of Dentistry
- Brittany Trinh
- Roshal Momin
- Rachel Buckley

School of Public Health
- Evit John, Historian
- Alexandra Alverenga
- Arlene Cortez

International Student Representatives
- Sehej Kaur Hara, SPH, Treasurer
- Jayanta Mondal, GSBS
- Liang Wu, SPH

At Large Representatives
- Micaela Sandoval, SPH, Secretary
- Ouchiri Nwaobia, SPH
- Anik Banerjee, GSBS

The 2019-2020 Student InterCouncil