

UST Social Justice Interest Group: Bringing Awareness to Pertinent Health-Related Topics and Inspiring Advocacy



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Abstract

The purpose of the Urban Service Track (UST) Social Justice Interest Group (IG) is to provide education and experiences about the importance of advocacy and social awarenesses in multiple health-related settings. The IG is student-led and met on a monthly basis. Members were asked during the first meeting of the IG what topics they wished to be discussed, and co-leads chose the most prevalent topics from a list created from the suggestions of IG members. The co-leads invited content experts and guest speakers to discuss their careers and various topics of interest involving health activism. Additionally, two supplemental videos were provided to IG members prior to the third meeting of the year, and later discussed during the regular meeting time. In the second to last meeting, a NARCAN training and educational workshop hosted by the Greater Hartford Harm Reduction Coalition was done in place of a formal meeting to bring the IG members together in an in-person event. The goal of all of these activities was to engage UST students in the many areas of social justice in healthcare, and demonstrate how healthcare professionals are essential in the advocacy and education of these topics in communities.

Background

- The Urban Health Track/AHEC Scholars Program is a 2-year curriculum that involves participants selected from the UCONN Schools of Pharmacy, Nursing, Medicine, Dental Medicine, Social Work, and the Quinnipiac University's Physician Assistant (PA) Program. The program is designed to educate students on the unique needs of Connecticut's underserved populations through an interprofessional curriculum.
- The UST/AHEC Interest Groups allow students to explore specific issues facing patient populations.
- The Social Justice IG explored different topics related to social justice including racial justice, environmental justice, and health equity in response to drug overdose. It is led by UST scholars Xenia Bradley from the UCONN School of Medicine, Karishma Harjani from the Quinnipiac PA program, Maitreyee Kale from the UCONN School of Medicine, senior coach Ezii Umejiego, MS-4, and alumni partner Jon Lis, MD. This year, it consisted of 15 students (including co-leads) from UST cohorts 14 and 15. The group hosted speakers, interactive discussions, and hands-on training with community partners and experts in the field.

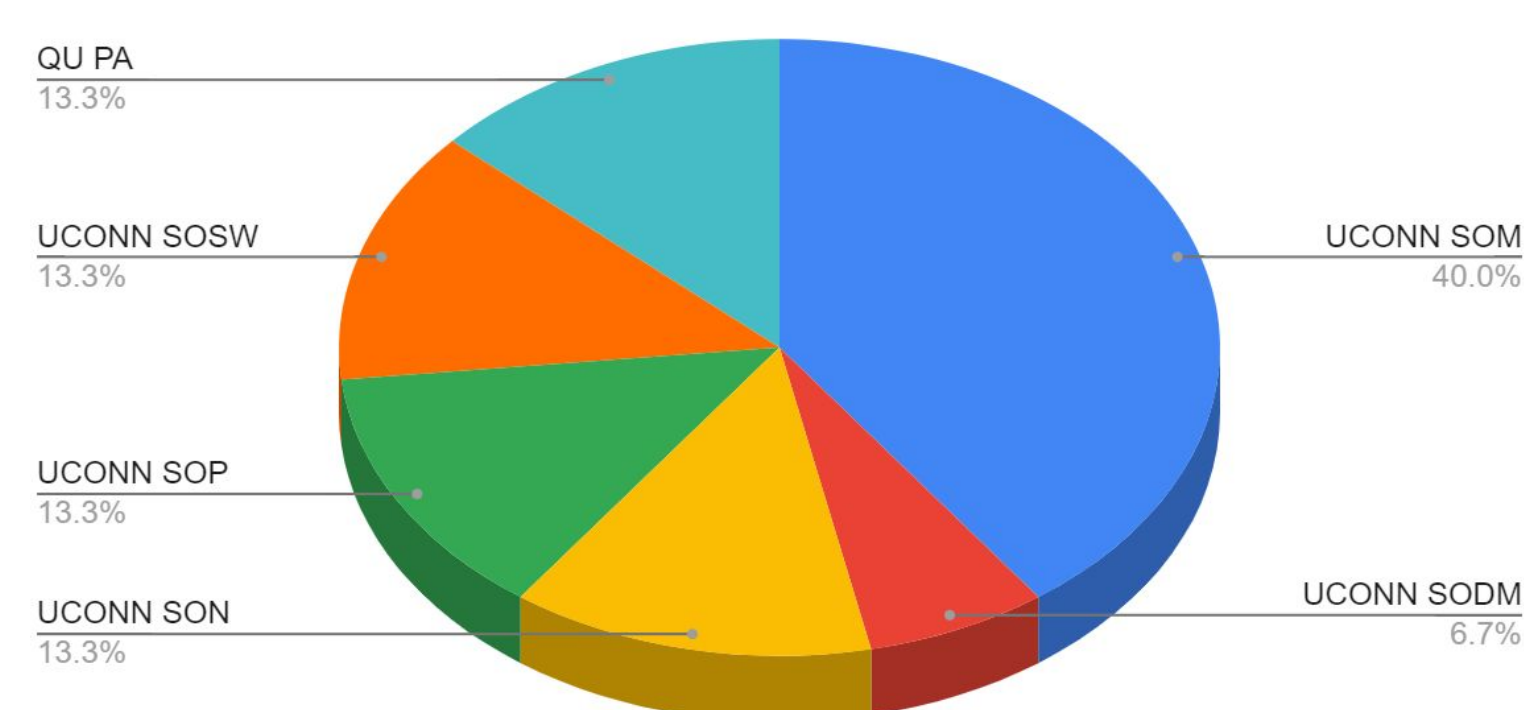


Fig.1: Graph showing this year's student breakdown within the Social Justice IG (including the co-leads)

- The overarching goals of the IG were to learn more about health disparities and to explore ways in which we can strive to achieve social justice as future healthcare providers. We worked to achieve these goals through interprofessional discussions, expert speakers, and community trainings.

Objectives

- To bring awareness to the various roles healthcare professionals have in different social justice settings
- To engage members via discussion and educational activities guided by content experts
- To use education to inspire advocacy and engagement in racial justice, environmental justice, and health equity

Methods

- 5 IG meeting were conducted between the months of November 2021 and March 2022.
- When2Meet surveys were distributed by co-leads to coordinate monthly online meetings on Zoom
- Prior to meetings, the co-leads briefed members on the topic that will be discussed and if there were any content experts invited to speak to the group.
- Content experts and guest speakers were recruited to provide interactive informational experiences to IG members based on the topic of that month's meeting
- Co-leads sent out Google documents for members to write down any questions they had for content experts and guest speakers prior to that month's meeting
- Collaborative discussions were conducted to allow IG members to apply their understanding of various topics and hear the perspectives of other students from different disciplines.
- Co-leads collaborated with the Greater Hartford Harms Reduction Coalition to provide NARCAN training to members and provide interactive education on overdose and substance use.
- Interactive feedback was given to the IG's leadership via WebWhiteboard during the last meeting

Results

- During the first IG session in November, members gave suggestions to co-leads on what topics should be discussed throughout the academic year
 - Co-leads compiled a list of ideas from the IG's kick-off sessions and chose the most relevant topics to present at each meeting
- Two guest speakers were invited to speak to the IG about their respective fields
 - Dr. Shayna D. Cunningham, Ph.D. -- Introduction to Social Justice
 - Evan Weber, B.A. Economics and Environmental Sciences -- Social Justice in the Context of Climate Change
- Educational Activities
 - Supplemental videos from YouTube used for preparation of the December meeting discussion on health equity and advocacy:
 - Antoinette Carol at TEDxHerndon -- [Justice by Design](#)
 - Ronald Sullivan at TEDxMidAtlantic -- [Justice is a decision](#)
 - In-person NARCAN and Substance Use Workshop
 - Presented by Alixe Dittmore of the Greater Hartford Harms Reduction Coalition (GHHRC) to the Social Justice IG

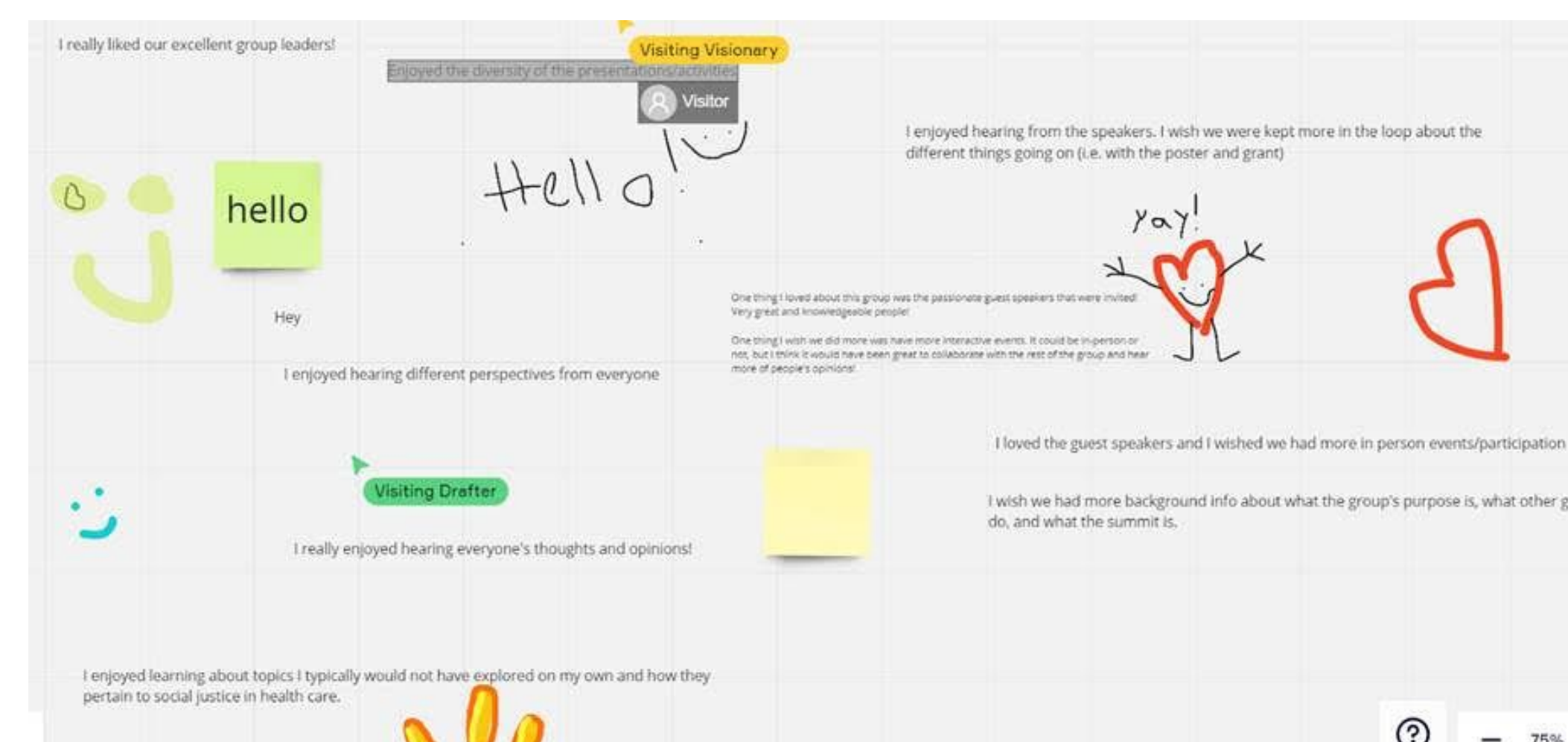


Fig.2: WebWhiteboard feedback about the IG's performance and IG member engagement

- Members that attended the last IG meeting held in March gave interactive feedback via WebWhiteboard
 - Overall, members thought that the IG succeeded in fulfilling its core objectives
 - There was desire from the IG members for more interactive activities and information on the IG's purpose

Discussion

- Overall, the Social Justice IG showed a strong selection of topics and activities this year that left an impact on UST students
 - Strengths:
 - Members thought that there was an appreciative amount of diversity in meeting topics and guest speaker content
 - The guest speakers that were invited were impactful and engaged members
 - The meeting topics were interesting to IG members and promoted healthcare advocacy
 - Collecting information from members to tailor the members' experiences during meetings
 - Communicating with IG members about meeting times and event details
 - An open environment was promoted in the IG that encouraged members to discuss various topics and share their unique perspectives
 - Areas to Grow:
 - Providing adequate information to IG members to keep them informed on the IG's purpose and activities within UST
 - Coordinating more interactive activities for members to engage in
 - This was limited partially by the pandemic
 - Polls and surveys should be given in the future for students to provide feedback after events

Conclusion and Future Direction

- As COVID-19 restrictions are beginning to loosen, the IG will be able to coordinate in-person events for members to attend
 - Promote more active participation from UST students and interaction amongst the IG members
- The IG will work to provide methods of receiving feedback from its members to engage the IG's overall performance throughout the year
 - Be able to understand what IG members desire to learn during the academic year and figure out what events/activities are preferred
- Co-leads and faculty advisors will engage with students on this IG and other IGs' purpose within UST
 - Inform students about the various roles and responsibilities they will can have within the IG and what resources they have to accomplish their assigned tasks

References

CT AHEC Program at the UCONN Health Center
[Urban Service Track/AHEC Scholars Program](#)

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