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AHEC Scholars Focus on Social Determinants of Health

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention defines Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) as “such conditions in the places where people live, learn, work and play affecting a wide range of health risks and outcomes.” A person’s economic stability, education level, neighborhood safety, social support system and lack of access to healthy food and health services contribute to their ability to live healthy lives. AHEC Scholars are health professions students selected to participate in didactic and experiential learning activities that focus on caring for the most vulnerable populations in rural and underserved urban areas. The Missouri AHEC Scholars Program recognizes SDOH as one of the core topics for our future health professionals. Examples of activities that focus on Social Determinants:

- West Central Missouri AHEC Scholars in Kansas City participated in “The Last Straw” activity, which allows students to build a personal profile based on race, gender, sexual orientation, economic and other factors that place them high or low on a social determinants level. Students built empathy with marginalized people and gained an awareness of various social determinants and how they affected those people’s ability to “move forward” or “fall back” regarding healthy living.
- All Missouri AHEC Scholars were given the opportunity to participate in a Poverty Simulation which allows them to role-play a month in poverty and experience low-income families' lives. The goal of the Poverty Simulation is to shift the paradigm about poverty away from being seen as a personal failure, understand poverty as a failure of society and bridge the gap from misconception to understanding. It sensitizes participants to the realities of poverty.
- Northwest Missouri AHEC Scholars participated in the Walk for the Homeless, an event coordinated by the Missouri Western State University Social Work Department. Scholars walked through downtown St. Joseph to different facilities that provide assistance to the homeless population of St. Joseph. Representatives from these facilities explained the purpose of the facility, including whom they serve, what services are provided and how to become more involved. This event increased AHEC Scholars’ awareness of the issues of homelessness in St. Joseph and also provided them with knowledge about resources that work to address this issue.
- West Central Missouri AHEC Scholars volunteered at *Project Connect*, a one-day service event held in rural areas that provides health services, community resources, haircuts, free coats, hygiene and cleaning products and more. This five-hour event served hundreds of people who struggle to obtain services located throughout the county by bringing community agencies together in one location.

MAHEC: Connecting students to careers, professionals to communities, and communities to better health



Missouri AHEC Scholars participating in a Poverty Simulation

MAHEC 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 St. Louis
- Northeast Missouri AHEC Kirksville
- Northwest Missouri AHEC St. Joseph
- West Central MO iAHEC Lexington
- Mid-Missouri AHEC Rolla
- East Central MO AHEC– St. Louis
- Southeastern MO AHEC Poplar Bluff
- Southwest Missouri AHEC Springfield