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University of Missouri and Missouri Area Health Centers Host the Rural Immersion Program in Monett, Missouri

Missouri has the 6th highest number of shortage areas in the where about 45% lack access to necessary medical services. A major reason for lack of access is the shortage of healthcare workforce in rural communities, with significant disparities in terms of primary care, nursing and specialty care (18% of Missouri doctors practice in rural communities, while 37% of state residents live in rural communities). As a result, health outcomes in Missouri rank poorly with 11.2% of Missouri residents reporting chronic health conditions. Meanwhile, Missouri rural communities experience some of the worse health outcomes in the state.

To respond to this severe need, University of Missouri, a Missouri AHEC program office, established the Rural Immersion Program, an interdisciplinary, non-clinical program. The Rural Immersion Program teaches students the cultural, social and communal aspects of life as a rural healthcare



provider. The goal of the program is to give health professional students the opportunity to envision whether living and working in a rural community might be right for them. It also provides them with skills to ensure better treatment for rural patients by providing opportunities to work with students from differing disciplines to explore four pillars within the community:

- government and employment
- agriculture, tourism, and natural resources
- arts, culture, and education
- healthcare and public safety

Rural Immersion will be hosted in Monett Missouri from June 26-29, 2023. Students will explore the community through a variety of activities organized by community members including a healthcare panel, agricultural and business tours, and meetings with local leaders. The program provides students with an opportunity to better understand the advantages of living and providing medical care to rural communities. Rural Immersion is funded through a grant provided by Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) and is a collaboration of the Missouri Area Health Education Centers (MAHEC), University of Missouri Extension, and the University of Missouri School of Medicine Rural Track Program.

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
- East Central Missouri ECMO AHEC – St. Louis
- Mid-Missouri AHEC – Rolla
- Northeast Missouri NEMO AHEC – Kirksville
- Northwest Missouri NWMO AHEC – St. Joseph
- Southeastern Missouri SEMO AHEC – Poplar Bluff
- Southwestern Missouri SWMO AHEC - Springfield
- West Central Missouri WCMO AHEC – Kansas City

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