

CONNECTING PIPELINES TO PATHWAYS FOR HEALTH EQUITY

Summer Health Professions Education Program (SHPEP): A Promising Model Pathway Program Preparing Diverse Pre-dental Students during a Global Pandemic

THE AMERICAN DENTAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

KEY POINTS

For the past three decades, the Summer Health Professions Education Program (SHPEP) has introduced more than 30,000 college students to careers in the health professions and supported their successful application and matriculation to health professions schools.

- ✓ SHPEP is a transformative residential experience for rising college sophomores and juniors interested in the health professions. The program began over 30 years ago, and more than 30,000 individuals have participated.
- ✓ The program invites applications from individuals who identify with historically underrepresented races and ethnicities (HURE), including, but not limited to, African American/Black, American Indian and Alaska Native, and Hispanic/Latino, and who are from communities of socioeconomic and educational disadvantage.
- ✓ Applicants must also demonstrate an interest in issues affecting underserved populations, earn a minimum GPA of 2.5, and be a U.S. citizen, permanent resident, or have DACA status.
- ✓ SHPEP provides academic enrichment, career development, learning and study skills, clinical exposure, financial literacy, health policy, interprofessional education, mentorship, and health professions education admissions guidance.
- ✓ Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the program quickly transitioned from an in-person to a 100% virtual experience. Despite the challenges of the global pandemic, SHPEP continued to serve its target populations without interruption.

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Remodeling a pre-professional pathway program to deliver virtually an enriching experience that helps improve the racial and ethnic composition of the dental workforce.

The United States is experiencing a health professional shortage. More than 10,000 additional dental practitioners are needed to meet the oral healthcare demands of the U.S. Dental Health Professional Shortage Areas; and racial and ethnic

diversity among dentists does not currently reflect the increasingly diverse U.S. population. In support of its goal to advance education access, diversity, and inclusion in dental education, the American Dental Education Association is a partner in the Summer Health Professions Education Program. Since 2006, the program has increased the number of historically underrepresented students entering and graduating from dental school and other graduate health professions schools. However, beginning in summer 2020, the program was in a

precarious position due to the pandemic and was challenged to quickly convert its successful in-person residential program to a virtual experience.

THE ADEA AND SUMMER HEALTH PROFESSIONS EDUCATION PROGRAM (SHPEP) APPROACH

Introducing college students to careers in the health professions and supporting racially and ethnically diverse populations in successful application and matriculation to health professions schools.

SHPEP is a free academic enrichment program for rising college sophomores and juniors interested in the health professions. In 2006, the American Dental Education Association (ADEA) became a partner in the program, which at the time was the Summer Medical and Dental Education Program (SMDEP). In 2016, the program expanded to include nursing, optometry, pharmacy, physical therapy, physician assistant, and public health, and was renamed SHPEP.

Funding and Staffing Support

Funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the SHPEP National Program Office (NPO) is staffed by the ADEA and the Association of American Medical Colleges, who provide direction and technical assistance to the 12 program sites at universities across the country.

Program Adjustments to Continue During Pandemic

In 2020 and 2021, the program continued without interruption despite the pandemic. Historically, program highlights included the opportunity for students to be in residence on campus at a SHPEP site and in-person individualized support from fellow scholars and program site staff. Because of the pandemic, it seemed the program would lose these important benefits. The NPO and SHPEP sites considered cancelling the program in 2020, but with workforce diversity in a precarious position, the cost was too great. Instead, the program changed to a virtual experience with an abbreviated four-week program.



The NPO surveyed incoming scholars, gauging their interest in a virtual program and concerns about participating online (e.g., laptop accessibility, internet connectivity, food insecurity, a necessity to work to support family). The survey revealed most accepted scholars were eager to participate, even if SHPEP was virtual. SHPEP sites committed to digital equity by reallocating funds budgeted for housing, food, and travel costs to provide loaner laptops and internet hot spots to scholars in need. During the program, each scholar was awarded the SHPEP stipend and an additional subsidy to help address potential food insecurity. Program sites developed online curricula that featured synchronous and asynchronous learning methods, creating flexibility for scholars who required summer employment or were caregivers.

Program Best Practices

SHPEP continued to implement best practices for positively impacting student persistence to apply and matriculate to dental and other health professions schools, including early exposure to health professions schools and their facilities, admissions guidance, writing workshops, and academic enrichment in scientific and quantitative topics. SHPEP sites also found innovative ways to provide remote clinical and practical experiences. For example, SHPEP pre-dental scholars at some sites developed manual dexterity by creating soap carvings, taking impressions of their own teeth, and engaging in virtual simulations of hands-on dental activities. Some sites offered scholars the opportunity to view recorded patient interactions and participate in virtual clinic tours.

Given the renewed focus on social justice, program sites also facilitated sessions centered on race and social justice and matched scholars with mentors who served as additional resources. Mentors, who are current graduate health professions students, help small groups of SHPEP scholars think through racial themes and what they learned in the program. Consistent with best practices, SHPEP mentors reflect the diversity of SHPEP scholars, allowing scholars to see students like themselves who have successfully entered health professions schools.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Feedback about the 2020 virtual program indicated a four-week program was insufficient to gel as a cohort and made it difficult to fit in the desired curricular content. Leveraging this feedback, the 2021 virtual program successfully returned to the six-week model. Additionally, the cost savings and flexibility of online implementation allowed for program expansion, and more than 100 additional scholars participated in the 2021 program than in 2020.

Virtual implementation also increased collaboration between sites on curricular activities, enhanced curricular content, provided flexibility for scholars who had other obligations, and opened access to “nontraditional” students who could not participate in a residential program. While it is impossible to virtually replicate the benefits of an in-person experience, most scholars who participated in SHPEP online reported they would recommend the program to a peer.

The adaptability and nimbleness of SHPEP over the past two summers has allowed nearly 2,000 historically underrepresented race/ethnicity (HURE) students on the pre-professional pathway to virtually engage, learn and grow personally, academically, and professionally, even amid a pandemic.



RESULTS/OUTCOMES

- Pre-pandemic, the program annually accommodated 960 students across the 12 SHPEP program sites. In 2020, 922 students participated in a virtual program.
- Capitalizing on lessons learned from 2020, the 2021 virtual SHPEP expanded to 1,040 participants, serving more than 100 additional students.
- Since ADEA joined the program in 2006, 2,517 pre-dental scholars have participated in the program and 1,563 (62.1 percent) applied to dental school. Of those applicants, 1,273 (81.4 percent) enrolled.
- As of 2021, 929 SMDEP/SHPEP pre-dental scholars have graduated from dental school. Of those dental school graduates, 46.6 percent identify as HURE and 66.3 percent are women.
- In the 2020 entering class at U.S. dental schools, SHPEP HURE participants had an enrollment rate 14.5 percentage points higher than HURE applicants overall.
- SHPEP continues to support ADEA's institutional goals of increasing the number of HURE students on the dental profession pathway who are interested in providing culturally competent dental care, reducing educational barriers, and helping to achieve dental workforce racial/ethnic parity within the United States.

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND RELATED MATERIALS ABOUT THE SHPEP AND THE ADEA

www.shpep.org

www.adea.org/adi

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