Building an interprofessional community through educational equity and workforce diversity

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BACKGROUND

- **Education offers a pathway to health equity through educational attainment and diversity in the health workforce.** Educational attainment impacts health disparities via psychosocial environment, work, and knowledge.[1] Students of color face several barriers to completing higher education, leading to a lack of diversity in health professions further down the pipeline.[2,3] For 100 Latinx students in K-12 in California, only three will earn graduate degrees.[4] Supporting students of color through trauma-informed, health pipeline programs may address individual and collective healing while bolstering diversity in the workforce.[5,6]
- The **North Orange County Allied and other Health Careers Opportunity Program (NOCA HCOP)** seeks to address barriers for low-income, underrepresented, and first-generation college students in an urban region in California. As the endpoint of a partnered pipeline that starts with a local high school district, NOCA HCOP's **Graduate Student Ambassador (GSA) and Undergraduate Trainee (UT) programs** unite disadvantaged students from public health, social work, and rehabilitation therapy, who may be marginalized in their respective academic programs. Students receive holistic support to pursue their educational goals and reflect on how their personal experiences of resilience could improve health equity using an interprofessional approach to health disparities.

METHODS

1. **Intervention:** During the 2018-2019 academic year, HCOP conducted 3 retreats with graduate and undergraduate students interested in social work, public health, communicative disorders, and physical therapy. Case managers met with each student monthly from December through May. Faculty mentors from the departments of social work, public health, and communicative disorders provided guidance to graduate students.
2. **Data collection:** Students completed post-test surveys two weeks after each retreat. Interactions with case managers and faculty mentors were evaluated via focus groups with students before the last retreat in April.
3. **Analysis:** Post-test surveys were analyzed by running frequencies on Likert-scale items. Focus groups were analyzed by identifying themes within each focus group (i.e., undergraduate trainees, graduate student ambassadors) and then across both groups.

Social workers can leverage **interprofessional training** to create an **empowering community** for **urban students of color** in social work, public health, and rehabilitation therapy.

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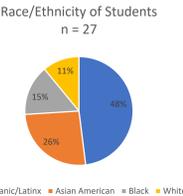
THANK YOU

RESULTS

- **27 students served:**
  - 12 graduate (5 MPH, 5 MSW, 2 MACD)
  - 15 undergraduate
  - 100% low-income, first-generation college student, and/or from an underrepresented background in graduate education

Race/Ethnicity of Students
n = 27

■ Hispanic/Latinx ■ Asian American ■ Black ■ White

- **NOCA HCOP encouraged students' reflection, resilience, and motivation.**
  - "I recently had a huge breakdown and so [faculty mentor] was able to maneuver around that and help me not feel so stressed about it" – GSA
  - "One of the case managers one time was like, okay you acknowledge the big steps but also acknowledge the little things. You have to let go of, like, spending time with your family to get to where you're at and not just I got into grad school and that's a big moment, but look at everything you have done." – GSA
  - "Well for me, I don't think the case manager is that different from all of us because she used to go to Fullerton College, too, and she got her masters here, so she can relate to a lot of the things that we are going through. She is also female so I really look up to her cuz the things that I struggle with, she used to struggle with too. She really mentors me through school and through life and personal things." – UT
  - "Since I'm a transfer student as well I had a hard time adjusting onto this campus and I feel like this program helped me in a way like it motivated me to get out of my comfort zone." – UT
  - "I think that if you're in a underserved population that you should have access to health care regardless of what your race is and that's something that once I got into this program I realized that it's my responsibility that once I do graduate that I should actually be that bridge point that I can relate to that community" – UT
- **Students felt supported in a diverse, interprofessional community.**
  - "It's just going into the grad program as a first-generation college student and feeling like I need some extra support by faculty and as well as financial as well as pretty much all around because I don't have anyone to help guide me through this process." – GSA
  - "I think that mentoring for this program is like above and beyond the mentoring that I've had in any other program. First the student case managers we meet with them monthly so they're very supportive... they're always there. Mentors for our graduate program are always reaching out asking if we need anything. ... They're just always there and very supportive." – GSA
  - "Interacting with the grad students, like, they answer every question that you have about grad school so they kind of help. Like you know, I look up to them too because like they have more experience than we do. So they're giving us advice on what to expect and, like, what should we do and, like, applying." – UT
  - "There is not a lot of diversity [in graduate school] but being apart of this program makes me feel like I am not alone." – GSA
  - "I feel like social justice is just hard to define in general... Being aware of the inequalities that exist and you know doing something to change that and I feel like as first generation college students from minority backgrounds like we have that kind of minority experience of the inequality of that you know we feel.. just being in graduate school." – GSA
  - "My profession is moving to interprofessional development ... so I thought this would be a good way to collaborate with other professions, mm, as well as other students that are in similar situations as ... a first-generation college student." – GSA

Table 1. Sample Retreat Outcomes

Type of Support	Sample Item	N	% Agree or Strongly Agree
Graduate school resources (undergrad only)	I am familiar with campus resources to help assist me in applying to graduate school.	8	100%
Graduate school resources (grad only)	I am aware of resources on campus to help support me.	12	100%
Financial literacy	I gained a better understanding of financial management skills.	20	100%
Self-care	I feel that meditation is beneficial.	19	95%
Connecting with peers	I met at least one other person that I can relate to.	19	95%
Interacting with faculty	I feel more confident interacting with faculty members.	19	95%