



The University of Vermont

LARNER COLLEGE OF MEDICINE  
OFFICE OF PRIMARY CARE & AHEC PROGRAM

OFFICE OF PRIMARY CARE  
AREA HEALTH EDUCATION CENTERS PROGRAM (AHEC)  
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### AHEC Scholars Summer Research and Quality Improvement Projects—2021

The Office of Primary Care and AHEC Program offers a variety of opportunities for medical students enrolled in the VT AHEC Scholars Program during the summer between first and second year. The AHEC Scholars Program is a national program guided by AHEC’s federal Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) grant requirements. The overarching goals of the AHEC Scholars Program is for students to gain a valuable understanding about the numerous social and cultural factors that influence an individual’s overall health and their ability to access care. We aim to prepare tomorrow’s health professionals to become leaders in interprofessional, transformative practice who serve those who need it the most. Additional specific goals of the summer projects are to increase students’ knowledge and skills in research and quality improvement and to foster a lifelong interest in scholarly activity. In 2021, we have funding to support up to 20 students. The program is designed to be relevant to students with all medical specialty interests.

The AHEC Scholars Program is a voluntary program for health professions students interested in supplementing their education by gaining additional knowledge and experience in rural and/or underserved settings. It is focused on six core topic areas:

**Table. AHEC Scholars priorities**

Topic	Emphasis or examples
Interprofessional Education	-team-based care and patient-centered care
Behavioral Health Integration	-services that better address the needs of individuals with behavioral, mental health and substance use conditions
Social Determinants of Health	-addressing food insecurity, economic inequality, access to education, social and community context, access to health care, neighborhood and built environment, etc.
Cultural Competency	-care that address the unique culture, language and health literacy of diverse communities
Medical Practice Transformation	-quality improvement, care coordination, cost containment, rural health care, primary care, care for underserved or disadvantaged populations
Current and Emerging Health Issues	-HRSA-approved topics: opioids and substance use disorders, oral health as part of overall health

### Summer project format

1. Research and Quality Improvement instruction
  - a. All students complete basic instruction in research methods conducted via web-based asynchronous discussion group. Materials include the textbook *Designing Clinical Research* by Hulley and colleagues, and online tutorials from the *Institute for Healthcare Improvement*.
2. Research or QI project
  - a. Students typically work in teams of 2-5. The faculty and staff develop several topic areas each year, but there is considerable flexibility for the team to shape the direction of the project. The individual projects may include literature reviews, development or pilot testing of surveys or patient assessment instruments, primary data collection, provider or patient interviews, data analysis, writing up results, and editing.

The typical time commitment is 100 hours (40-hours AHEC Scholars didactic/standardized curriculum and 60-hours project-specific/field work) for which the students receive a stipend of \$1250.

These summer projects are designed to meet one year of the AHEC Scholars Program's required hours of eligible AHEC activities. To be designated an AHEC Scholar upon graduation, two years of required hours of eligible AHEC activities must be met. Currently, one year of AHEC Scholars hours and requirements are integrated in LCOM curriculum and met via the LCOM Family Medicine Clerkship in partnership with AHEC.

### Application

Submit CV and one page statement of interest to Dr. MacLean [charles.maclean@uvm.edu](mailto:charles.maclean@uvm.edu). The statement of interest should include your preferences among the five projects listed below.

### Please contact us with any questions

UVM Office of Primary Care and AHEC Program summer projects: Charles MacLean MD, [charles.maclean@uvm.edu](mailto:charles.maclean@uvm.edu)

Northern VT AHEC summer projects: Katina Cummings, [kcummings@nvtahec.org](mailto:kcummings@nvtahec.org)

Southern VT AHEC summer projects: Susan White, [swhite@svtahec.org](mailto:swhite@svtahec.org)

AHEC Scholars Program, generally: Liz Cote, [elizabeth.cote@uvm.edu](mailto:elizabeth.cote@uvm.edu)

AHEC general inquires: [ahec@uvm.edu](mailto:ahec@uvm.edu)

## Summer 2021 Projects

The following is a list of the topic areas and faculty for summer 2021.

### 1. Gardening project

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**Faculty:** Michael Latreille (General Internal Medicine)

#### Background

- Access to healthy food is one of the most important social determinants of health. Along with access to food, knowledge and experience in food preparation is essential for developing a healthy and sustainable diet.
- Dr. Latreille has been working with UVM Medical Center Nutrition Services and the *Vermont Community Garden Network* to teach gardening and nutrition to a cohort of patients with chronic disease, taking advantage of the rooftop garden at UVMMC. This project is funded in part by UVMMC grant.
- This project overlaps with efforts to screen and intervene regarding identified social determinants of health. Interested faculty include: Keith Robinson, Alicia Jacobs, Charles MacLean, Michelle Cangiano, Claudia Berger, and others.
- This project was active in 2020, but was partially disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The group is ready to partner with students in 2021 to continue their efforts and assess their progress.

#### Specific questions or goals for 2021

- Will teaching and demonstrating gardening have a positive impact on patient outcomes?
  - Weight, BP, glycemic control, attitudes, satisfaction, intention to garden, diet, many others

### 2. Electronic Medical Record Projects

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**Faculty:** Rachel McEntee (Hospitalist and Informaticist), Charles MacLean (General Internal Medicine), Marie Sandoval (General Internal Medicine), and others.

#### Background

- UVM Medical Center in the Epic EMR participates in the concept of *Open Notes*, in which patients have access to their medical records, including the notes generated by the health care team.
- While *Open Notes* has been in place at UVMMC for several years, it is not clear how well patients can navigate the Epic patient portal to access their notes, and, once they find the notes, how understandable or helpful they are. A 2020 summer project began to explore the patient experience with the patient portal, in collaboration with the UVMMC Innovation Center.
- In the spring of 2021 UVMMC will initiate *Open Notes* for the inpatient Epic notes and the hospital discharge summaries. There is an opportunity to study the patient perspective and response to this initiative.
- There are a myriad ways in which physicians and advanced practice professionals (Physician Assistants and Advanced Practice Registered Nurses) document in the medical record. There are

ongoing efforts in the Medical Informatics group to make medical documentation as efficient, accurate, and understandable as it can be.

- This project may appeal to students who are interested in informatics, health literacy, physician-patient communication, or patient education/activation.

### **Specific questions or goals for 2021**

- What are patient perspectives on access to their medical documentation, and to the patient portal more broadly?
- Understanding and reducing variation in medical documentation.

## **3. Population Management of Chronic Disease**

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**Faculty:** Mark Pasanen (General Internal Medicine, Hospitalist, Program Director), Charles MacLean

### **Background**

The Office of Primary Care has expertise in quality improvement and chronic disease. Past projects have included: Hypertension Management, Antibiotic Stewardship in the Outpatient Setting, Opioid Prescribing in Primary Care, Post-operative Pain Management, and others.

- Diabetes
  - SGLT2, GLP-1 RA, and DPP-4 medications are increasingly being used to treat Type 2 Diabetes, but prescribers in primary care don't have extensive experience initiating these medications.
  - There are several active efforts underway:
    - The Vermont Academic Detailing Program has recently provided education to primary care prescribers statewide
    - Vermont Project ECHO just completed an educational series on the management of T2DM
    - Dr. John King in Family Medicine has been working on a Maintenance of Certification project
  - There is a need for population health analysis and feedback to prescribers in Family Medicine and Internal Medicine to better understand the landscape of treatment for diabetes.
- COPD
  - The Gold guidelines regarding the diagnosis and management of COPD have a relatively new categorization scheme to help guide treatment of COPD that include use of patient symptoms scores, which are not yet uniformly used.
    - COPD Assessment Test (CAT score)
    - Modified Medical Research Council Score (mMRC)
  - There is a need for population health analysis and feedback to prescribers in FM and IM regarding use of symptom scores and patient classification.
  - This project will include reaching out to patients, likely by telephone, to assess symptoms.
- These population health projects may appeal to students interested in using clinical data to guide practice, the principles of audit and feedback, and clinical microsystems.

### **Specific questions or goals for 2021**

- TBD

#### **4. Transitions from Pediatrics to Adult Medical Care**

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**Faculty:** Kathy Mariani (Family Medicine) and Breena Holmes (Pediatrics)

- Transitioning care from pediatrics to adult medicine may be difficult, especially for young adults with complex medical conditions.
- The Vermont Child Health Improvement Project (VCHIP) has a decades-long track record of assisting practices with quality improvement projects. They have focused on this transition in recent years.

#### **Specific questions or goals for 2021**

- TBD

#### **5. Curriculum development**

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##### **Background**

- In prior years we have supported projects involving developing or enhancing the Larner curriculum. In 2019 and 2020 a project was focused on the curriculum related to transgender care.
- In 2021 there may be an opportunities to work on the curriculum addressing the social determinants of health.
- If you are interested in Medical Education please note this as a priority area in your application.