



The U-HELM program kicks off its first session at the University of Utah

On Monday, Sept. 17, 2018 new fellows and directors met alongside guest speakers at the Spencer F. and Cleone P. Eccles Health Sciences Education Building at the University of Utah (U of U) in Salt Lake City, Utah to kick off the new Utah Health Equity Leadership and Mentoring (U-HELM) program.

Effective mentoring and leadership development are some of the most critical components of a successful academic career. The U of U's U-HELM program has the goal of enhancing the academic excellence and leadership capacity of faculty and postdocs from underrepresented populations in the health sciences as well as health equity researchers at the U of U. U-HELM will focus on some of the challenges that trainees and faculty from minority and underserved groups as well those health equity researchers may face.

"I think this program will help me to see how others in similar career stages and advances stages are successfully, and not so successfully, navigating, academic advancement," said Susana Keeshin, a U-HELM fellow and Assistant Professor in the Department of Pediatrics at the U of U.

The three U-HELM directors, Kola Okuyemi, MD, MPH; Molly Conroy, MD, MPH, FACSM, FAHA; and David Wetter, PhD, MS, began the kickoff program by introducing the two guest speakers, Dr. Jose Rodriguez, Interim Associate Vice President for the University of Utah Office of Health Equity and Inclusion, and Dr. Paula Smith Interim Associate Vice President of Equity and Diversity at the University of Utah.

Drs. Rodriguez and Smith then introduced and discussed equity and diversity at the university and the many opportunities available to junior faculty and fellows such as themselves. The program participants then had the chance to introduce themselves and share their background and involvement in health sciences. Introductions were then followed by a culture box activity, an activity where participants were able to share more personal aspects of their lives to get to know one another beyond their academic achievements.

"Each one of us come from very different backgrounds," Keeshin said. "We all had a shared experience with regards to higher education and navigating the complexities of an academic career."

The twelve fellows, along with the three directors, range from medical providers, instructors, and



researchers studying research topics such as infectious diseases, HIV/AIDS, epidemiology, cancer, and more.

The U-HELM Kickoff meeting marked the beginning of the U-HELM program at the University of Utah. It was inspired by HELI, a summer boot camp style leadership and mentoring program from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and University of Maryland and then then a similar program at the University of Minnesota.

“I think the program will offer some much needed insights from our peer and more senior mentors,” said April Mohanty, a U-HELM fellow and an Internal Medicine Instructor. “It is great to have the opportunity to cross-pollinate ideas related to diversity and helping those who are undeserved across our departments and divisions within our institution.”



The program will consist of nine seminar series sessions from October 2018 to June 2019. Each seminar will consist of a presenter and allow the fellows and coaches to learn more and discuss mentoring as well as equity and diversity in underrepresented populations in academic settings. Fellows will be matched with a U-HELM mentor within the U of U. They will also have the opportunity for training and development, mentoring, and networking through the course with the directors, as well as external faculty advisors.

“I hope to come away from the program with a sense of empowerment to support diversity within the University of Utah,” Mohanty said. “One of my goals is for the program is that I can be positioned to place a firm stake in the ground as it relates to disparities research and I think it will give me and others the opportunity to get more than just a foot in the door.”

To learn more about the U-HELM program, visit medicine.utah.edu/dfpm/training-mentoring/u-helm/