**The Future of Public Health: How the COVID-19 Pandemic Affected a Public Health Educational Pipeline**

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Background: The Covid-19 pandemic increased awareness and interest in the field of public health, but decreased in-person internship opportunities. LSUHSC continued its funded summer internship program through the height of the pandemic. High school, undergraduate, and medical students engaged in remote, data-based research, participated in professional development workshops, and presented at the virtual symposia. The team has examined how the pandemic changed participants’ interest in public health research and pursuing public health careers.

Objectives: 1) Determine if pandemic-related public health awareness increases the number of interns conducting research with LSUHSC School of Public Health (LSUHSC-SPH) mentors. 2) Assess the participants’ post-internship knowledge and career interest in public health.

Methods: More than 650 interns (2014-2022) completed anonymous surveys with qualitative and quantitative questions that produced formative and summative (impact/outcome) evaluation metrics.

Results: The number of participants who conducted research with LSUHSC-SPH mentors increased by more than 10-fold in the 9-year period. The Goals Attainment Scale and the Research Appraisal Inventory revealed knowledge gains, confidence in research and presentations, and interest in future careers in public health. Despite the 2020 virtual activities, interns learned cutting-edge research (e.g., biostatistical software) and innovative practices in biomedical and public health sciences.

Conclusion: Pandemic-elevated interest in public health led interns to develop increased awareness of issues that affect their lives/community. The LSUHSC Summer Research Internship Program prepared students to become competitive for future public health careers and fostered a pipeline for recruitment to the LSUHSC-SPH undergraduate and graduate programs. Additionally, it provided current LSUHSC-SPH graduate students the opportunity to mentor. Our study provides evidence for designing valuable remote summer research internships.

Recommendations: Additional public health-related projects were conducted by mentors in the Schools of Medicine and Graduate Studies, which were not included in the analysis. The inclusion of these additional projects may strengthen the results.