



ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN REPORT

Summer 2021

Chicago Area Schweitzer Fellowship
29 E Madison, Suite 602
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- Improving Health, Developing Leaders, Creating Change -

**THE ALBERT
SCHWEITZER
FELLOWSHIP®**

25 years social justice in action

Background

The Schweitzer Fellowship is a year-long critical service-learning program for graduate students in health-related professions who will design and implement innovative direct-service projects aimed at improving the health and well-being of underserved Chicago area communities.

The Schweitzer program embraces the World Health Organization definition of health as a state of mental, physical, and social well-being and not merely the absence of illness or infirmity. Many Fellows' projects address the social determinants of health, such as literacy, violence prevention, mental health/stress, and healthy lifestyles.

Fellows participate in a 13-month cohort-based program including social justice, health equity, and policy didactic meetings and presentations, as well as skills development and interprofessional development. Each Fellow also designs and implements an independent 200-hour community engagement project. 28 Fellows are selected annually in a highly competitive process. In 2022, over 110 students applied. Chicago Schweitzer Fellows conduct their project with health centers, social service agencies, schools, community organization, and nonprofits throughout Chicagoland, thereby helping the organizations expand their capacities. To date, our Fellows have partnered with over 150 agencies. Since the Program started in 1996, 700 Chicago Area Schweitzer Fellows have provided over 130,000 hours of service.

Through their community projects and participation in a year-long program that includes mentoring support, monthly meetings, written reflection, and interprofessional collaboration, Schweitzer Fellows are developing the skills and confidence needed to become Leaders in Service—professionals who will remain dedicated to informed and engaged public service and to creating change.

After successfully completing their initial year, Fellows become members of a national Schweitzer Fellows for Life alumni network of more than 4,000 Leaders in Service. The Chicago Fellows for Life Network provides year-round activities including networking events, a seed grants program, skills trainings, and volunteer opportunities.

The Chicago Area Schweitzer Fellowship program is one of 13 chapters around the country and is independently administered by Health & Medicine Policy Research Group, a Chicago nonprofit organization that works to improve the health of all people in Illinois by promoting health equity. The Fellows' work is entirely funded through contributions from local foundations, individuals, and academic institutions.

Introduction

As the 25th anniversary of the Chicago Area Schweitzer Fellowship Program approaches, evaluation of the current program and consideration of next steps for growth are key. The goal of this environmental scan is to better understand the strengths and area of opportunities for the Program. Various graduate level programs in the Chicagoland Area with a required a community service aspect were included in this scan. Ultimately, nine of the most similar programs were compared to the Schweitzer Fellowship.

Strengths

The Schweitzer Fellowship stands out among the other programs in several ways:

- **Mentorship:** The Program stands out for its strong support system in the form of formal mentors in addition to the support of its program staff. The main support system that the other programs include for their participants is their program staff. The inclusion of formal assigned Peer, Academic, and Community Site Placement mentorship provides Schweitzer Fellows with more personalized guidance as they face challenges while pursuing their projects and developing into social justice and health equity leaders in their fields.
- **Participants accepted:** While the Schweitzer Fellowship is highly selective (typically accepting fewer than 30% of applicants), the Program is offered to a higher number of participants annually, when compared to other programs, which accept < 20 participants (see Table 1). Offering the fellowship to a higher number of participants allows for more widespread community engagement annually, a more robust interdisciplinary cohort experience, and ultimately a larger alumni network.
- **Alumni Network and Programming:** Among the nine other programs, there was not an official alumni network similar to Schweitzer's "Fellows for Life." Many of the other program directors mentioned that they hoped to better organize their own alumni networks in the future. Fellows for Life allows Schweitzer Fellows to remain active both in the program and in the community long past their original Fellowship year through programming, networking opportunities, grants, and intellectual and community engagement offerings.
- **Longevity:** Among the ten programs included in this environmental scan, the Schweitzer Fellowship is second oldest program. As a result, the Program benefits from an impressive established history and prestige that the majority of other programs do not have.
- **Interdisciplinary Learning:** The Schweitzer Fellowship is one of the few programs that accepts students from various graduate schools. The majority of the programs are school-specific, meaning that the school that offers the program *only* accepts students from their own school (see Table 1). Offering the fellowship to a wide variety of graduate schools provides Fellow's access to a unique network of like-minded and diverse leaders that they would not otherwise be a part of, from different schools and from different disciplines.

Opportunities

The main area of opportunity identified for the Schweitzer Fellowship is increasing its stipend. Schweitzer offers one of the lowest stipends relative to its required time commitment. Given that graduate students take on a significant financial burden with their tuition and have limited time due to their intensive curriculum, competitive applicants are likely to be heavily influenced to choose extracurricular programs based on their financial compensation. Students will be less motivated to pursue the Schweitzer Fellowship if they could pursue similar programs that offer higher financial compensation relative to the required time commitment. Furthermore, the Schweitzer Fellowship stipend has not been increased, consistently over the lifetime of the Program, to adjust for inflation and cost of living, because of funding constraints. Table 1 includes a breakdown of the stipend and the required time commitment of each program. Furthermore, more research is needed to investigate the ethics and conceptual frameworks of critical service learning and other community engagement opportunities to reduce harm and strengthen the program.

Name of Program	Affiliated School	Annual Number of Participants	Stipend	Time Commitment
Chicago Area Schweitzer Fellowship	N/A	30	\$2750 – \$3000	200 hours
Mayor’s Office Summer Fellowship Program	N/A	15-25	~\$7,700 (\$20/hr)	385 hours
AmeriCorps Illinois	N/A	> 1800	\$4,725	Full-time or part-time over 10-to-12-month period
Urban Medicine	University of Illinois at Chicago	18-20	N/A, co-curricular	4 years (hours vary based on project)
Harrison I. Steans Graduate Fellowship	DePaul University	7	\$1,800 (masters-level) & \$2,000 (doctoral level)	100 hours (over 1 quarter) *can be renewed for 2 more quarters*
Racial Equity Fellowship	DePaul University	2	\$2,000	100 hours
Fred S. Bailey Fellowship for Community Leadership, Service and Activism	University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign	2	\$12,600	9 months
Graduate Engagement Opportunities Community Practicum	Northwestern University	8-12	PhD students receive typical stipend	100-200 hours
Activism and Community Engagement Program	University of Chicago	25	\$2,500	200 hours
Nate Thomas Public Service Scholarship	Illinois Institute of Technology	Unknown (1st cohort this Fall)	\$15,000	1 year

Table 1: Comparison of the 10 programs that were evaluated in this environmental scan based on major strengths and areas for opportunity areas: affiliated school, number of participants annually, stipend and time commitment.

Challenges

There is not a database for graduate-level community engagement programs which provided the initial challenge in compiling this report. Furthermore, given that most programs are less than 10 years old, they do not have enough data about their own programs to confidently provide best practices in critical service learning. As a result, there is a significant gap in research regarding graduate-level community engagement programs in the Chicagoland area.

Next Steps

Review of funding opportunities, budgets, and costs is necessary to pursue the opportunity of increasing stipends to ensure that the Schweitzer Fellowship is competitive with other similar programs in the area.

The Schweitzer Fellowship would benefit from initiating collaboration between and amongst critical service-learning programs in the area, including but not limited to the nine other programs included in this environmental scan. Specifically, The University of Chicago's Activism and Community Engagement (ACE) Program appears to be the most comparable to the Schweitzer Fellowship (see Table 1). Discussions with this program could lead to new ideas to tackle challenges and opportunities for growth most applicable to the Schweitzer Fellowship.

This environmental scan identified major strengths that should be highlighted and opportunities that should be considered specific to the Chicagoland Schweitzer Fellowship. These factors should be considered by leadership during upcoming strategic planning. Going forward, it may be useful to conduct environmental scans like this one every few years as existing programs grow, and new programs are established for the Schweitzer Fellowship to continuously reach its full potential.