The goal of the Interprofessional Teams: Collaborative Learning to Improve Communication Knowledge and Skills (IT CLICKS) project is to prepare our students to communicate effectively with peers, other professionals, patients, and the public through interprofessional teamwork.

The researchers and practitioners of the future must understand their broader role in the system of healthcare. The public and other stakeholders increasingly demand delivery of services that are patient-centered, culturally competent, safe and reliable, cost-effective, and sensitive to both health literacy and community health. A disconnected workforce that is trained only in technical or specialized practices cannot meet these demands. A system of care, not the individual researcher or practitioner is now the primary point of service. From the bench to the bedside, from the classroom to the clinic, from policy to practice our students must learn to work as members of collaborative teams and communicate clearly and effectively with each other, patients, the public and policymakers.

Unfortunately, in the health sciences, communication and collaboration skills have historically been relegated to ancillary or elective studies. Or else, they have been expected to be learned as part of acculturation into the professions. Continuing this legacy risks undermining the effectiveness of our future workforce and placing our students at a disadvantage in the marketplace.

The Need for IT CLICKS

Currently, there is no formal, institution-wide curriculum at the Health Science Center for bringing students together into a shared learning space, nor is there a curriculum that trains our students to effectively communicate with colleagues or work in teams. Such a curriculum would ideally focus on understanding the values inherent in interprofessional practice and the roles and responsibilities of colleagues. Both faculty and students recognize this gap.

In a 2015 survey, the vast majority (90 percent) of Health Science Center faculty said they believe that interprofessional education is of vital importance to our students’ success, but only about one-third (36 percent) think that it is relatively easy for students to find opportunities to work with students preparing for careers in other healthcare/research fields. Further, only a little more than half (55 to 56 percent) say that our students are receiving adequate experience learning about the roles of other healthcare/research professionals and working in teams. Moreover, when asked if our students are being adequately prepared on each of a list of 18 skills, faculty ranked our students’ level of preparation in oral and written communication skills among the bottom 10.
Students have also expressed their desire for more opportunities to interact with other professionals and recognize their need to learn to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences. In student focus groups conducted in 2015, students were vocal about the need for more interprofessional experiences. One student said:

*Our school has a wonderful platform to promote interdisciplinary collaboration, but it is under-utilized.*

Several other students, from across the Health Science Center, expressed similar sentiments:

*If we are better able to communicate the importance and results of our research, we are more likely to achieve translation to the clinical arena, generate general interest in science, and improve funding opportunities for translational research.*

*I feel that initiatives to teach select courses, with students from different disciplines in the same classroom, would improve teamwork and collaboration in professional practice.*

...an attitude of working as a team, helping to educate each other and doing what is best for the patient is the goal.

Further, a 2016 institution-wide survey of our learners reveals that almost all students (98 and 94 percent respectively) believe that it is important to:

- be able to speak effectively about science and health issues with peers and stakeholders
- understand the roles of different medical and research professionals and effectively communicate with these colleagues

Yet, in the same survey our learners expressed the feeling that they are not being fully trained to do so. Substantially smaller percentages of students feel they have been adequately trained to:

- effectively communicate with their peers (86%);
- understand the roles of other professionals (72%); and,
- communicate effectively with other professionals or with stakeholders (employers, patients, public, and policymakers) about their work in science or healthcare (72%).

**IT CLICKS Alignment with the Mission and Strategic Vision of the Health Science Center**

As a strategy for strengthening our curricular programs and meeting future needs of the workforce, the Health Science Center’s 2013-2017 Strategic Vision lists, among other items:

- Expanding and enhancing curricula in new and emerging areas, such as interprofessional learning, translational science, prevention and community/population health;
- Developing and enhancing collaborative multidisciplinary and interprofessional education programs; and
• Expanding interprofessional community/population health care experiences designed to enhance health care experiences for students.

Similar sentiments (e.g., engaging students in interprofessional education and health literacy) are found in most of the individual school strategic visions.

Interprofessional education in healthcare is no longer a novelty. It is a requirement. Interprofessionalism has been embraced as a standard of educational practice by nearly all of our major professional accreditation bodies, from the Liaison Committee for Medical Education (LCME) to American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN). Further, during the last decade the major health related professional associations formed the Interprofessional Education Collaborative to develop and publish core competencies for interprofessional collaborative practice (American Association of Colleges of Nursing; the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy; the American Dental Education Association; the American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine; the Association of Schools of Public Health and the Association of Medical Colleges).

Health science institutions across the nation have responded to this call for action by embracing interprofessional education as the key to preparing students to operate in professional team environments. Most of the Health Science Centers in the University of Texas System now have dedicated directors of interprofessional education.

Adoption of the IT CLICKS project will align the Health Science Center with both system-wide and national standards and practices.

The IT CLICKS Proposal

The IT CLICKS project seeks to bring interdisciplinary curriculum design and teaching strategies to bear on developing effective team-based practices combined with a curriculum that will strengthen the communication skills of our students as they interface with multiple audiences.

Center for Interprofessional Education and Communication: The Center will be charged with fostering a culture of excellence in interprofessional communication and teamwork, and lead the effort to bring down barriers to interprofessional education (e.g., varying schedules, varying locations, registration across schools, etc.). This Center will include educators representing all schools on campus and will be charged with developing and orchestrating faculty development programs. The Center will also provide guidance and support for the curricular interventions that will shape the next generations of researchers, scholars, clinicians, and leaders from our institution. Its activities will include:

- Developing an interprofessional health science communication curriculum and working with the various programs to incorporate it into existing curricula.
- Designing Interprofessional workshops for students on such topics as
  - Understanding the roles of other healthcare/research professionals
  - Talking about health, medicine and science.
- Overseeing faculty enrichment workshops for the faculty who are leading the student teams and teaching the communication curriculum; and any faculty that want to
improve the way they are teaching students to work in teams and develop their communication skills.

- Coordinating the development and implementation of the interprofessional teams of students and faculty.

**Interprofessional Student Teams:** Starting in year two of the project, students in the first and second years of their curriculum will be organized (similar to the Veritas teams in the School of Medicine) into interprofessional teams (approximately 20 students) lead by faculty (2 per team from different fields). These teams will engage first in foundational workshops on effective interprofessional communication including team structure, role-related responsibilities, and team skills. Interactive, team-based exercises will promote collegiality. The learning objectives include:

- Articulating roles and responsibilities of each member of a health care or research team;
- Demonstrating the ability to communicate with and work effectively in a team; and,
- Demonstrating the ability to facilitate ethical decisions or choices related to professionalism as members of a health care or research team.

During the foundational workshop, students will begin to apply core concepts as they relate to one of several core content areas starting with the ethical and professional issues directly related to communicating with interprofessional members of a team.

Subsequent workshops and projects will incorporate other content areas for application of core communication and teamwork strategies. The Center will explore opportunities for identifying high-yield topics that best fit with the needs and resources of schools across campus. These topics may include:

- health literacy and cultural diversity assessment
- protecting vulnerable populations in human subjects research
- disclosing medical or research errors
- communication related to pain and end-of-life care, and
- quality improvement

The culmination of the team process will involve these interprofessional groups of students and faculty in a community service project where the communication and team skills they have learned can be applied.

**IT CLICKS Student Learning Outcomes**

If the IT CLICKS project is successful, students will be able to:

- Speak clearly and vividly about health/scientific information;
- Define roles and responsibilities of the different health professions;
- Define health literacy;
- Discuss an Interprofessional teamwork approach to health literacy;
- Demonstrate sensitivity and tolerance of differences;
- Speak at different levels of complexity for different audiences;
• Enhance the efficacy of healthcare delivery by rapidly transitioning into roles as functional leaders and members of healthcare teams.

Resource Estimate for IT CLICKS

The IT CLICKS project is estimating that the following resources will be needed for successful development and implementation of the project. It is proposed that:

• The Center for Interprofessional Education and Communication be opened during the first year of the project and sustained throughout. It will be staffed by a senior director (1 FTE), an administrative assistant (1 FTE), a program coordinator (1 FTE) and one or more educational development specialists (maximum 2.0 FTE). It can be housed anywhere in the institution and will administer an appropriate level of funding for the proposed programming.

• The project will use existing resources in the library, AFSA, the HEB Clinical Skills Center and the School of Nursing Simulation Center for implementation of learning activities, the evaluation and assessment of the project and other tasks, as needed. The potential need for additional staff in one or more of these areas will be explored in the development of the full proposal for SACSCOC.

• Faculty from each of the schools will be required to lead the student interprofessional teams each year starting in year two of the project. Ideally, in year one, this same group, in collaboration with the Center, will be tasked (.20 FTE each) with designing the team-based curriculum and student workshops.

Assessment of IT CLICKS

The assessment of the IT CLICKS initiative will be designed to collect both formative and summative data. All services, events and team activities will be evaluated to collect data to help us identify strengths and weaknesses and improve these activities.

In addition, the overall impact of the IT CLICKS initiative will be measured using both indirect and direct measures.

Indirect measures:

The IT CLICKS team will work with Academic Quality Enhancement, Institutional Research, the individual schools and community partners to develop indirect measures, such as:

• Develop measures of student and faculty attitudes about the institutional commitment to interprofessional education and the adequacy of opportunities provided for interprofessional engagement.

• Survey the community partners who are recipients of the student team projects about their level of satisfaction with the student teams and how well they worked as teams to implement their project.

Direct measures:

Assessments measuring changes in student’s knowledge about the roles of other healthcare/research professionals and specific communication strategies and skills (from comprehension to application) will
be embedded into the team-based curriculum. These measures will be designed in concert with the development of the curriculum.

Available Local Expertise and Resources

We have strong faculty and staff expertise to draw upon in the development and implementation of this project, including, among others:

**Ricky Joseph**, PhD, OTR, Assistant Professor in Occupational Therapy. Dr. Joseph has been appointed to serve as the Health Science Center’s representative on the state-wide presidential task force on interprofessional education.

**Jan Patterson**, MD, Associate Dean of Quality & Life Long Learning, School of Medicine and chair of the Health Science Center’s faculty committee on interprofessional education.

**Kathleen Stevens**, EdD, MS, BSN. Professor, School of Nursing, Director of the Academic Center for Evidence-based Practice (ACE), School of Nursing and an expert on TeamSTEPPS (an evidence-based teamwork system aimed at optimizing patient care through the improvement of communication and team work skills).

**Jessica Raley**, PhD. Assistant Professor and Director of Research operations in the Department of Surgery, Division of Trauma and an expert in communication effectiveness training and curriculum development in healthcare with a concentration in interdisciplinary team communication and patient-provider interaction.

Various faculty from a variety of schools and professions involved in the development and implementation of volunteer, interprofessional opportunities for students in community clinics, such as the San Antonio Refugee Clinic

**The Center for Medical Humanities and Ethics**, School of Medicine. The Center provides a university-wide community service learning program that models interprofessionalism as a way to prepare a relevant health workforce.