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Spring May 4, 2021

Centering Social Justice and Equity in a Public Health Curriculum

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Centering Social Justice and Equity in a Public Health Curriculum

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BACKGROUND

- The St. Kates public health program was created to be aligned with the vision and mission of the institution, emphasizing global health, diversity, and social justice.
- Social justice and public health are inherently tied through definitions of health, human rights, and the centering of social determinants. Yet, these assumptions do not get at the current reality of public and global health, which despite best intentions, continues to participate in systems which perpetuate inequity locally and abroad.
- Our public health faculty and staff have also noted the need for resources to help facilitate challenging topics. We have grappled with the questions of ‘ who is left out, which students benefit from not confronting hard topics in class, etc.’

Systemic racism continues to allow for white students to decide if students of color’s voices should be included in the classroom.....This system doesn’t work. The work to change it requires continuous effort. It must be a priority. It must be visible. (MPH Student)

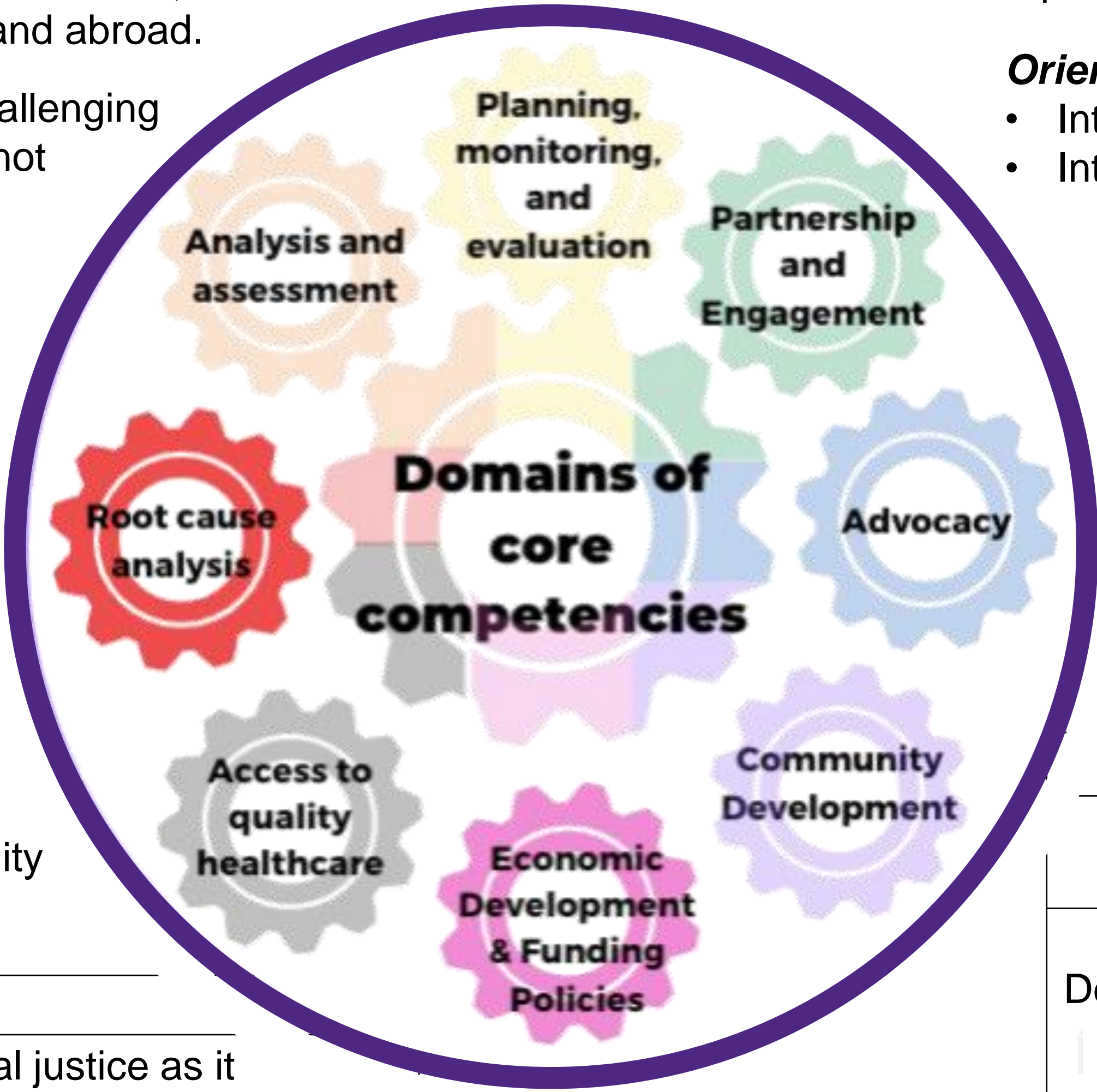
METHODS

Interprofessional Collaborative Approach

- In collaboration with faculty, students, community stakeholders, internal advisory boards along with our own research into curriculum development and best practice and as a result, we developed a social justice “training program.”
- The program will combine the ideas through readings and discussions along with teaching tangible skill sets that will facilitate students’ ability to incorporate social justice and health equity into public health work.

Table 1. Social Justice Training Program Goals

Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reform current curriculum with a more intentional and explicit focus on social justice as it relates to global and local public health and structural imbalances in our systems.• Create a coherent curriculum that seamlessly weaves social justice as the common thread throughout the core courses
Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increase student knowledge of social justice concepts as they relate to public and global health throughout their time in the MPH program• Increase student skills for implementing social justice and health equity in their work in the field of public and global health by the end of their time in the MPH program• Increase in critical thinking and challenging discussions for students within their time in MPH program• Graduate students who are prepared to promote and address health equity from a global social justice framework
Faculty	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide support for faculty members in incorporating new materials into their own courses
Community Members	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Engage community members in the process of integration of social justice and health equity into the MPH program at St. Kate’s



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Implemented into nine core MPH courses

- Each class period will focus on one ore more of the nine domains of the core competencies

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Orientation

- Introduce incoming students into the program
- Introduce definition of social justice to incoming students

Class sessions

- Root cause analysis
- Small and large group discussion
- Presentation
- Group activity

Evaluation

- Comprehensive evaluation focused on comparisons between pre- and post-tests for students
- Combination of qualitative and quantitative data to analyze within each group

Table 2. Example Lesson Plan

Lesson Title	Political and Economic Influence
Lesson Description	In this class, students will explore the global political and economic processes that influence resource allocation. We will begin with some historical context focused on distribution of funds and colonization. We will discuss the IMF and the history of aid through videos, lectures, and small and large group discussion.
Student Learning Outcomes	Students will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Describe the relationships between social determinants of health and inequities• Discuss historical structural racism and how it impacts health• Identify harmful policies and describe their impact on marginalized communities• Discuss the influence the IMF and World Bank has on health and health disparities

CONCLUSIONS

- We want our students to be among a new wave of public health graduates advocating for social justice and related teachings to be further incorporated and centered in their educations. This is not simply more individualized cultural competency but approaches that face the structural inequities and power dynamics that must be.