Dear HEPH Members,

We welcome you to this unique faculty experience to learn about health literacy and the many ways we can teach health literacy content to our students in the clinical professions, social work, and public health fields. This course is for you, the faculty member, to learn about and deepen your understanding of health literacy as well as learn ways to teach your students about health literacy.

We are an interdisciplinary faculty team from the University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP) School of Public Health and the professional schools at the University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB), and experts in health literacy and interprofessional education. We are committed to helping faculty and students learn about health literacy and how it affects most interactions with patients, clients, and the public.

Our faculty team was formed to support an MPower project in the summer of 2020. MPower is a funded initiative to connect UMB and UMCP on projects that benefit Maryland residents. In the MPower project, a team of UMB students from six disciplines and an undergraduate student from the UMCP School of Public Health reviewed health literacy literature and assessed health literacy content in their own curricula.

At UMB President Bruce Jarrell’s request, the faculty and students maintained the team during the 2020-2021 academic year to participate in the President’s Symposium and White Paper Project. This initiative engages faculty, staff, and students across UMB in a yearlong conversation on a topic of importance to the University and its community. The health literacy white paper was unique in inviting UMCP participation.

The project’s focus was to examine how health literacy is taught in UMB schools and the UMCP School of Public Health and develop a list of recommendations the two campuses could take to address health literacy as a social determinant of health. One of the recommendations in the students’ white paper was to provide faculty with resources to teach health literacy to students in medicine, nursing, dentistry, pharmacy, social work, law, and public health.

These modules directly respond to that recommendation, aligning with campus goals and core values focused on equity and justice. We ensure equity and justice when we make information available to all. Effective communication is critical to high-quality, person-centered care, and health literacy practices are a key element of effective communication between professionals and the people they serve. Applying health literacy principles improves health services and reduces health inequities. Interprofessional and equity-focused learning experiences are essential for preparing future health care providers, public health professionals, and social workers to collaborate. The goal is to equip them to provide team-based care to improve the well-being of individuals, communities, and whole populations.

We welcome your feedback on this course, and look forward to hearing about your experiences bringing health literacy into your teaching.

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