Celebrating the Achievements of the Sanford Institute for Empathy and Compassion in Its Second Year
LEARNING
The T. Denny Sanford Institute for Empathy and Compassion equips aspiring leaders in empathy and compassion to transform the world.

UC San Diego is, at its core, a place of learning. Where we not only develop new knowledge but pass it on to the next generation of leaders, our community and our world. The Sanford Institute is home to some of the brightest aspiring minds on earth, all committed to playing a role in fulfilling Denny Sanford’s vision for a wiser, more compassionate planet. Several of these students wish to share their experiences of the last year.
REEM HALABI

“I have expanded my knowledge about empathy, burnout and resilience in the medical field, and the various ways of measuring these variables along with the challenges that come with using different measurements. It has definitely made me more interested in gaining knowledge about empathy and compassion. Hopefully I can continue to conduct research that allows UC San Diego and other schools to implement curricula that increase empathy and combat burnout among medical students.”

CAITLYN BELZA

“Involvement in the Sanford Scholar program has shaped my medical education in many ways. It has provided the opportunity to develop an innovative idea of personal interest into a research study. It has given me perspective on rational and scholarly methods of investigating new information while allowing me to exercise scientific creativity. The program has taught me to respect process over outcome, and finally it has allowed for relationships to build with members of Sanford Institute faculty who have similar interests and goals in promoting the future of science and medicine.”
ADAPTING TO A NEW NORMAL:  
ERIC MILLER

Eric Miller is a Sanford Scholar and member of the Class of 2023 at UC San Diego School of Medicine. His project as a Sanford Scholar studies how adolescents’ mental health and emotional well-being are influenced by their social environment. This includes disparities and structural violence (e.g., language or distance barriers that prevent people from accessing health care services they need). It also explores sources of socio-emotional resilience—the social structures in place that allow people to thrive despite the barriers in their way.

“I reached out to [research advisor] Janis H. Jenkins, PhD, even before the white coat ceremony to express interest in working with her lab, so it has been a dream to be able to develop an independent project within her research group with the help of the Sanford Scholars program. I was originally hoping not only to do data analysis, but also to collect ethnographic data among adolescents. Unfortunately, that was not an option due to COVID, as well as resource constraints within the research group. However, as always happens, one door closing marks the opening of another.

It turned out that the data that was already collected over the past couple years had barely been analyzed, and certainly it had not been analyzed deeply from a quantitative lens. As such, my background in computational research allowed me to make a lot of headway this summer and to contribute something unique to the research team. I also had a chance to explore qualitative analysis for the first time this summer, which was one of my goals for this project and working with the Jenkins Lab. At the same time, I have faced some challenge in doing mixed-methods research, which has required working within research cultures with relatively distinct “languages”. My background is in computer science and computational neuroscience research, so it was a learning experience to shift to working in an anthropology lab. One of the takeaways for me is that mixed methods work requires building collaborations that embrace the unique expertise of different research groups might bring to the table, and that those kinds of collaborations take time to develop… My work this summer has helped to spark new questions and opened new doors, for which I am grateful.”

The MedGap Sanford Scholars program offers a highly unique opportunity for a year between medical school and residency focused entirely on research in the area of empathy and compassion. The year allows for in depth, publishable and impactful research and an early career opportunity unlike any other. This year, Cathrine Keiner was able to participate in the MedGap program. Her work is helping address burnout among health care workers who stand to be better equipped for their jobs thanks to Cathrine’s research.

SPECIAL HIGHLIGHT
MedGap Sanford Scholar Cathrine Keiner

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FACULTY MENTOR
Sidney Zisook, MD

RESEARCH PROJECT TITLE
Distress and Burnout among Health Care Workers in the Setting of COVID-19 and the Impact of Proactive Outreach

PROJECT DESCRIPTION
The UC San Diego Healer Education, Assessment and Referral Program focuses on trainee and health care worker wellbeing, burnout, mental health, and suicide prevention through a multipronged approach, including 1) the Interactive Survey Program (ISP) to proactively screen for suicide risk by assessing the mental health of UC San Diego medical and pharmacy students, trainees, physicians, and health care staff; and 2) the no-cost, confidential counseling program for house staff. My project will leverage the ongoing ISP to better characterize emerging sources and levels of caregiver distress related to the COVID-19 pandemic, and further investigate how medical students and resident physicians have been emotionally impacted by these recent changes.
Some of the deepest challenges facing empathy and compassion practices in health care lie in the fact that oftentimes, the medical community doesn’t have the full context of the challenges that face the people they serve. A comprehensive understanding of the sociopolitical and racial realities that many groups experience is vital to provide holistic and respectful care for people of all backgrounds.

Last year, the T. Denny Sanford Institute for Empathy and Compassion officially launched its Center for Empathy and Social Justice in Human Health. We are proud to welcome its director, Dr. Gentry N. Patrick, an internationally acclaimed expert at the intersection of neuroscience, mentorship and equity.

“Mr. Sanford has given us an amazing opportunity to leverage past efforts and create dedicated spaces to listening, innovating and collaborating to increase equity and social justice in our community’s wellness systems.”

Gentry N. Patrick, PhD
Director, Center for Empathy and Social Justice in Human Health
Director of Mentorship and Diversity, Division of Biological Sciences
Professor, Division of Biological Sciences
**EMPATHY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN ACTION**

A key priority of this center’s mission is to look through the lens of social justice in order to analyze and inform the work done across the Sanford Institute and the surrounding community. By initiating collaborations fueled by shared commitments to social justice, the center is poised to catalyze systemic change and longstanding impact in human health, STEM and other areas all across the neighborhoods of San Diego and beyond.

In Fall 2022, the center will launch a pilot project in partnership with campus entities such as the Division of Biological Sciences and the Center for Mindfulness, as well as community partners such as the Compassion Institute. The project will reach out to more than 1,600 incoming first-year students within biological sciences. This degree track is the biggest pipeline from undergraduate study to the medical school program at UC San Diego. The goal is to connect them with peer mentors, graduate advocates, faculty, and staff in the spaces of the mission and tenants of Sanford Institute for Empathy and Compassion, in order to inspire them of the importance of empathy and compassion from the moment they step foot on campus. In turn, we hope to attract a deeper, kinder group of medical students to lead your vision forward into the future.

In addition, the center anticipates the launch of a communications and awareness campaign to visibly define its scope of partnership and impact. This will include efforts such as:

- **Community storytelling** to inspire understanding and empathy
- **Roundtables** to coalesce diverse topical perspectives and expertise
- **Fireside chats** to make significant discussions publicly accessible

Ultimately, this awareness campaign aims to build a better understanding of how and why empathy and social justice are essential to reducing health disparities and inequities within marginalized communities.

**LOOKING FORWARD**

In the next few years, our center aims to extend the existing Sanford Scholars program model to reach students within the undergraduate and pre-collegiate stages of the medical school pipeline by establishing Sanford Undergraduate and/or Community Scholars programs. The collective efforts between constituent centers of the Sanford Institute will be applied to existing student support programming across campus (e.g., student mental health services, faculty and staff assistance programs, educational curricula, etc.). By bringing all these resources together, we can integrate empathy and compassion, through the lens of improved social justice.

Dr. Patrick and the Center for Empathy and Social Justice in Human Health are excited to see how such efforts improve the persistence, success, and representation of a diverse student population in the STEM and health care profession pipeline.

The UC San Diego School of Medicine Program in Medical Education – Health Equity (PRIME-HEq) is an initiative to train physicians to better meet the needs of patients traditionally underserved by the medical system—one of many efforts at UC San Diego to educate empathetic providers and serve the community.
DISCOVERING
How our research is leading to breakthroughs

The T. Denny Sanford Institute for Empathy and Compassion leads the way in understanding the biological underpinnings of empathy and compassion — and creating new ways to leverage that knowledge.

T. Denny Sanford and His Holiness the Dalai Lama share a vision of discovery — aimed at both the biological underpinnings and the practical uses for these deeply human traits. The faculty and staff of the Sanford Institute for Empathy and Compassion are redefining exactly what we understand about empathy and compassion and revolutionizing the way we leverage these areas to create a healthier, better world.
Everyone involved is proud to be part of a hopeful initiative led by Bill Mobley and supported by Mr. Sanford. As part of our research, the team started with addressing some hiccups in communication between faculty and leadership. Through the course of six months of listening and in collaboration with the Sanford Institute, our team has been able to build an established trust with faculty who are experiencing acute burn-out and hopelessness.

The team observed that staff found themselves stuck in narratives that were perpetuating the inability to formulate their needs and messages in a constructive way. It was quickly realized that the group needed to pivot our attention to building bridges and establishing trust. This paved the way for critical discussions to take place with the stakeholders on both the faculty and leadership side. Our process involved deep listening, curricular initiatives that foster connection and engagement, and incorporating community building workshops and offerings in the arts to help people step outside of their circumstances to gain broader perspective on creativity, solutions and mental health.

One example of how this research impacted frontline caregivers: one of the clinics was in crisis and contacted us as a last-ditch effort to save their practice. Some of the faculty were skeptical that change could ever happen. After two workshops in listening and building narratives, they are now engaging directly with leadership to make and implement change in their practice. The clinic directors share that they see hope, which has replaced a “loss of identity” and autonomy. After just six months of seeking and discovering, the center’s team has already been able to impact this clinic and many others.

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States, the center’s team quickly designed and fielded a large, national survey study on dispositional compassion and empathy and how those things are related to health behaviors and prosocial attitudes at the start of the pandemic.

In just 14 weeks, the team collected data from over 5,000 adults in the U.S. The feedback on the subsequent paper included the recognition that our study design and implementation at such a “critical time” was “rare” and “to be commended.” There are already several other manuscripts in preparation for submission and the center has established collaborations with researchers beyond UC San Diego to help move its projects forward.

Being able to have this opportunity at this point in time, at this point in history, is very meaningful. And it comes at a time when we’re able to support research that can really probe how shifts in the world are impacting people’s mental health, both healthcare providers and people everywhere. And that is one of the priority topic areas of our next round of seed grants.

The Sanford Institute for Empathy and Compassion team has compiled a manuscript titled “Learning to Practice Compassionate Care: Medical Students Discuss Their Most Memorable Lessons” featuring Sanford Institute leaders including Cindy Schairer, Cinnamon Bloss, Christopher Cannavino, Lisa Eyler, Jenna Tutjer, and William Mobley. The paper reports on the results of six focus groups conducted with UC San Diego medical students in their fourth year of training. The project explored how medical students have been trained to interact with patients and will hopefully be published soon.
THE CENTER FOR MENTORSHIP IN MEDICINE
Exploring how to train aspiring physicians to care for others and themselves

Christopher Cannavino, MD
Director, Center for Mentorship in Medicine
Associate Professor, Division of Infectious Diseases

Our center continues to make new discoveries through the Center for Mentorship in Medicine, including expanding the master clinician program to be part of four of the mandatory clerkships that students take in their third year of medical school. The newest additions are in neurology, internal medicine and reproductive medicine—the program has been part of the pediatrics clerkship since 2016. This is possible thanks to an increase to more than 60 master clinicians helping mentor our students.

Through this growth, we continue to discover new insights about the program that we can use to not only improve our offerings here but also share with other institutions interested in following our lead.

The team is also working to share the research coming out of the Sanford Institute and this center. Specifically, the Center for Mentorship in Medicine has designed an inaugural Symposium for Innovation in Medical Education aimed at showcasing medical education efforts and successes as well as the latest research from the Sanford Institute and UC San Diego School of Medicine. To date, there has been a lack of a formal curriculum addressing teaching and learning in medical school education so our hope is to continue this symposium annually as a way to promote and advance the educational mission of UC San Diego and ensure that faculty remain at the forefront of medical education.

RECOGNIZED EXCELLENCE
Dr. Christopher Cannavino has been recognized for the excellence of the Center for Mentorship in Medicine with accolades including: 2020-2021 Barbara and Paul Saltman Distinguished Teaching Award for Non-Senate Members and the 2021 UC San Diego School of Medicine’s Kaiser “Excellence in Teaching” Award. Both are an affirmation of the transformative quality of this initiative of the Sanford Institute.

THE CENTER FOR EMPATHY AND COMPASSION TRAINING IN MEDICAL EDUCATION
Giving students the tools they need to succeed through empathy and compassion

Lisa Eyler, PhD
Director, Center for Empathy and Compassion Training in Medical Education
Director, Neuroimaging Unit
Professor, Department of Psychiatry

Our research efforts have shown some of the best examples of what collaboration can do under the Sanford Institute for Empathy and Compassion—both in discovery and practice. The Center for Empathy and Compassion Training in Medical Education and the Center for Compassionate Communication teamed up with the Center for Mindfulness to support our third-year medical students. Experience has shown that this is the time in a medical student’s career when empathy and compassion often start to fade. Students are pressed for time and don’t always see good modeling of empathy by others as they begin seeing patients as part of a busy, often burned-out team of providers.

We were able to reach every third-year medical student during their transition week from the pre-clinical part of their education to the clinical years. We knew what we needed to do—inspire the students to maintain and grow the empathy and compassion they bring to their work—based on what we’ve observed. This year we were able to support them by turning what we’ve learned into tangible actions that help students be the compassionate caregivers that the Sanford Institute was inaugurated to train.
PRACTICING
Turning what we learn into what we do

Discovering and teaching can only do so much—to be the kind of institute that actually becomes the change it wants to see in the world, the T. Denny Sanford Institute for Empathy and Compassion must also practice empathy and compassion in new, innovative ways.
The Center for Compassionate Communication

Bridging art and medicine to increase empathy and compassion

Evonne Kaplan-Liss, MD, MPH, FAAP
Director, Center for Compassionate Communication
Professor of Pediatrics

Valeri Lantz-Gefroh, MFA
Director of Communication Education,
Center for Compassionate Communication

Over the last dozen years, Dr. Kaplan-Liss and Ms. Lantz-Gefroh have been leaders in the development of curriculum in the arts in medicine. As practitioners, not researchers, with a dozen years of experience and leadership in the development of curriculum, they noticed a lack of experiential learning opportunities for faculty interested in entering the field of humanities in medicine. National meetings and publication focus more on the research and description of arts-based projects; they lack a path to take what has been learned back to a home institution to implement. Now more than ever the need is growing to share and network innovations in this field.

In response, they created a monthly international program on zoom called “Let’s Jam; the Arts in Medicine,” to build a community for sharing best practices. An unexpected outcome of Let’s Jam has been the opportunity for physicians and health care providers to gain personal tools to support their wellness. For example, a recent Let’s Jam’s guest facilitator was Thomas Dooley. Dooley is a poet from Brooklyn who works with physicians in NY and goes to the bedside of patients with terminal illness to help them process their emotions. His session was attended by a chair/leader from Duke Medical School, who was so moved by the session that he offered an invitation to Mr. Dooley to teach for them. This forum can be a resource, not only of curriculum and innovation, but of professional artists who are ready and eager to share their talents and knowledge to a broader audience base.

Closer to home, they began a monthly zoom Brown Bag Lunch for our UC San Diego faculty and students, to break down silos and share exciting curriculum or initiatives in a casual forum. The program has proven wildly popular and well attended, quickly becoming an audience favorite and providing our community with perspective, collaborative partnerships in addition to a chance to unwind.

The Center for Empathy and Technology

New collaborations that leverage the power of technology to increase compassion

Cinnamon Bloss, PhD
Director, Center for Empathy and Technology
Associate Professor, Department of Psychiatry
Associate Professor, Department of Family Medicine and Public Health

There are two exciting new developments that put the work of the Center for Empathy and Technology at the Sanford Institute into practice while expanding our collaboration with like-minded organizations.

First, the Sanford Precision Health Scholars Immersive Learning Experience launched this fall. This program will offer second year medical students hands-on, interactive training for future research and practice at the cutting-edge of genomics and medicine, inspired by the values of compassion, empathy, social justice, and health equity. The pilot course is offered as an independent study for elective credit, and students will engage collaboratively with patient advocates, Augustana-Sanford genetic counseling trainees, genomics experts from industry, and leaders from the San Diego genomics community.

In addition, earlier this year, the Center for Empathy and Technology hired Taylor Berninger, the San Diego-based associate director for the Augustana-Sanford Genetic Counseling Graduate Program. Through this connection, the Center for Empathy and Technology is excited for the opportunity engage with genetic counseling trainees, genetic counselors from industry, and leaders from the San Diego genomics community.

In conclusion, the Center for Empathy and Technology looks forward to expanding our collaborations while sharing our best practices and building a broader community.
The Center for Mentorship in Medicine

Turning mentorship into action

Christopher Cannavino, MD
Director, Center for Mentorship in Medicine
Associate Professor, Division of Infectious Diseases

Our center is excited to expand our ability to mentor students in practicing empathy and compassion by extending our community of mentors to include fourth-year medical students via a mentorship pipeline for students applying to residency. Pediatrics has built a roadmap for students applying to the pediatric residency which includes informational sessions and resources from prior students and residents. We hope to replicate this in the other core specialties so students feel prepared for the residency application and interview process. The center is also integrating this offering into fourth-year clinical rotations to provide students with continued mentorship opportunities. That, combined with the Master Clinician Program becoming part of four of the mandatory clerkships that students take in their third year of medical school (the newest additions being neurology, internal medicine and reproductive medicine), means that we truly are entering into a comprehensive reimagining of what it means to mentor students in empathy and compassion.

The Center for Mentorship in Medicine has also been developing and delivering educational sessions as part of the Master Clinician Program with an emphasis on the importance of the art of medicine, health inequities, empathy and technology, and social justice. Sessions have been implemented into pediatrics, neurology, internal medicine and reproductive medicine to include interactive, small group sessions with the third-year medical students. This longitudinal curriculum provides a way to deliver neglected topics into the clinical curriculum and provide abstract concepts in the clinical setting. As the team evaluates current sessions and collaborates with the other centers of the Sanford Institute, they will continue to build the curriculum based on what they discover.

The Center for Empathy and Compassion Training in Medical Education

Medical students experience the benefit of compassion training in action

Lisa Eyler, PhD
Director, Center for Empathy and Compassion Training in Medical Education
Director, Neuroimaging Unit
Professor, Department of Psychiatry

Two recent projects served as opportunities to put empathy and compassion into practice for our students. First, in a two-hour workshop, the team introduced students to the concepts of empathy and compassion with quotes from fellow students about the challenges of being compassionate while on the wards. They then showed the changes in the brain that can result from learning to be more empathic and compassionate. Students then were led in a brief mindful self-compassion exercise which they could use in the future to promote wellness. For the rest of the session, they learned about compassionate communication in small breakout groups, recalling stories of their favorite or most meaningful interaction with a physician. Words from the story were gathered in a word cloud (pictured right). The session was wrapped up with a guided discussion about perspective taking and understanding others’ intentions by faculty trained to facilitate the session.

The second project involved students’ experience in the anatomy lab, a rite of passage in medical school. This is where students first practice hands-on skills and learn about the details of human biology thanks to generous donors who give the gift of their body. Anatomy Thread Director Geoffroy Noel came to the Center for Empathy and Compassion Training in Medical education with the idea to infuse more compassion and self-compassion into anatomy lab so that students could cultivate gratitude for the body donor while also caring for themselves when experiencing particularly emotional dissections (e.g., the head, heart or hands). Dubbed “Compassionatomy,” our project will bring contemplative exercises, developed by Jane Chun of the Sanford Institute and delivered by Dr. Noel, into the anatomy lab for all first-year students to experience. A subset of these students who agree will do assessments of their level of empathy, emotion and connection to the donor before, during and after the course to chart the impact of the program across the entire year. The team is excited to see if they can prevent the desensitization and numbing to the donor as a human with a life and a story that often happens by the end of the course—something that is critical to sustained emphases on empathy and compassion as students leave medical school and become practicing physicians.
COMMUNITY COMPASSION IN ACTION
Updates from the UC San Diego Student-Run Free Clinic Project

Even when a global pandemic arises, compassion and empathy cannot be put to the side—in fact it only becomes more important. That’s why when COVID-19 emerged, the Student-Run Free Clinic Project stepped up and adapted however it needed to. It carried on its mission of working with underserved people to provide dignity and health through cost-free services for people without access to medical care. The medical students took it upon themselves to lead these pandemic-aligned services, including hand-delivering medications and goods to families in need. While faculty supported the effort, students were the ones who initiated and sustained it.
THE UC SAN DIEGO STUDENT-RUN FREE CLINIC PROJECT

Providing high quality health care for the underserved while inspiring the next generation of health professionals

Michelle Johnson, MD
Director, Student-Run Free Clinic Project
Clinical Professor, Department of Family Medicine and Public Health

Natalie Rodriguez, MD
Associate Director, Student-Run Free Clinic Project
Associate Clinical Professor, Department of Family Medicine and Public Health

This past year has been a journey unlike any other year in our history. The Student-Run Free Clinic Project has faced many challenges and its people have been impacted personally and professionally by pandemics of all kinds—from racial inequities to COVID-19. But through it all, the center has remained inspired by so many people coming together with the shared mission of caring for patients and improving wellbeing in the community.

ENSURING ACCESS FOR ALL IN THE MIDST OF A PANDEMIC

One of our major accomplishments of the past year was the rapid implementation of telemedicine for our patients. A primary goal of the Student-Run Free Clinic was to ensure that all patients would be able to continue receiving primary and specialty care; this was accomplished through the teamwork of students, volunteers, health professional volunteers, interpreters, IT specialists, social workers, and the health promoter team.

The telemedicine visits were well received by the patients who reported they felt cared for; in fact, 100 percent of respondents rated their overall experience with telemedicine positively. This rating spanned over more than 3400 medical visits in 2020—an increase from the previous year. The telemedicine program was complemented by a new medication delivery service put on by project volunteers which made 2000 deliveries of vital medication and food prescription bags to people who needed them. All of this was possible in large part thanks to Mr. Sanford’s support.

A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO COMMUNITY HEALTH

This last year included multiple exciting highlights across all facets of care. A few highlights included:

» Partnering with UC San Diego Health to coordinate COVID-19 vaccination efforts. The result was three vaccination events and 486 patients and community members getting vaccinated.

» Social services support included providing patients with resources including eviction protection information as well as connection to relief funds, food banks and more.

» Mental health care for the more than 25 percent of our patients who receive those services. The last year saw a 30 percent increase in demand and the team provided more than 570 hours of psychotherapy.

» Pharmacy care, led by a team that fills more prescriptions in a half-day of clinic than an average retail pharmacy fills all day. They filled 32,000 monthly prescriptions this year, totaling $78,000 in value. In addition to that, the pharmacy received 1146 brand name prescription medications from pharmaceutical companies worth a total value of almost $18,000,000.

» Dental services in partnership with several community partners including pre-dental student volunteers, the SD County Dental Society and the community of volunteer dentists.
LOOKING AHEAD

The future of the T. Denny Sanford Institute for Empathy and Compassion is bright.

In addition to the projects outlined above, we have many exciting plans on the horizon thanks to the generosity of Mr. Sanford.

WHAT'S NEXT

» Increase visibility around campus through expanded course and practical offerings which in turn can broaden the impact and reach of the Sanford Institute’s work

» Build out the collaborations between constituent centers to maximize synergy and impact

» Solidify the Sanford Institute’s programmatic offerings for medical students and expand into our residency programs

» Expand our understanding of empathy and compassion and applying what we learn across the academic spectrum

» Formalize curricula that can be scaled and implemented at other institutions with the first iteration piloted at the University of South Dakota Sanford School of Medicine
Thank you for continuing the nontradition.

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to bring empathy and compassion into every component of medicine and to support the health care professionals who help those facing serious illness.

Together through the Sanford Institute and the Campaign for UC San Diego, we are empowering the next generation of innovators to blaze a new path toward revolutionary ideas, unexpected answers, lifesaving discoveries and planet-changing impact.