Congrats UICOMP Class of 2022!

On Match Day, Friday, March 18, all 65 of our students learned where they will be assigned for residency training. Students, families, and friends celebrated in-person as the Class of 2022 opened their envelopes at 11 am, along with other fourth year medical students nationwide. Let us wish nothing but success for our new graduates as they start the next stage of their medical careers.
By Kenichi Haynie (M1)  
Photographs by Zaphrirah Chin

April 1st 2022, Bradley University’s Multicultural Association of Pre-Matriculated Health Students, or simply MAPS, hosted a viewing party of AAMC’s *Black Men in White Coats*. The film’s purpose is to shed light on the fact that Black Men are the least represented population in the field of medicine. In fact, there were fewer Black men in Medical school in 2014 than in 1978. This is a serious problem. Even worse, it isn’t that Black applicants get denied at a higher rate than other students: less and less Black men have the desire, the means, the resources, or inspiration to even apply. This is why we as students were excited to get involved in such an event.

We were able to bring together 7 Black M1s (3 of which are male), and Mindi Miller (Assistant Director of Admissions), to represent UICOMP. After the viewing, we facilitated dialogue with the students about their raw feelings; Why they thought Black men were not well represented in the field? Why does it matter, and what are the long term effects? And most importantly, what can we do about it?

A common theme was that “You can’t be what you can’t see”. As children, we are often told we can be whatever we want, but how can we truly believe that if we’ve never seen people that look like us in those capacities? Children are conditioned that professions such as a medical physician are not for people like us. I am convinced that part of our mission as Black students at UICOMP is to prove it is possible to become a Black doctor in America, and to inspire the next generation of capable minority physicians to combat racial disparities in medicine.
As an M1, Zaphrirah Chin has been working with Dr. Vazquez-Melendez Dean of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion to bring events to campus that gives medical students, especially those who identify as underrepresented minorities in medicine, the opportunity to interact with residents and attendings who look like them because representation matters. Inspired to put on an event highlighting Women in Medicine for Women’s History Month, Zaphrirah took matters into her own hands to put together an esteemed panel of Black female physicians. Zaphrirah crafted uniquely thoughtful and downright stimulating questions that had audience and panelists interacting. Pure, raw truth came from absolutely brilliant Black women in the form of uplifting stories and advice that really impacted our female first years.

All where welcome to listen to their powerful voices this past March 30th at 6pm. Light dinner was provided followed by a few rounds of Bingo where prizes were raffled off.
So I figured that a lucky bamboo stalk would be a fitting gift for the next generation of physicians! Thankfully, Green Pollex provided the opportunity to send off the M4s with a living reminder of their time at UICOMP, especially one that will grow with them! With an attached note that reads: "Happy Match Day! Lucky Bamboo is a symbol of luck, prosperity, and well being. We hope that you take it with you in residency and watch it grow and thrive with you". We truly wish the graduating M4s the best and I extend gratitude to Green Pollex, Deb Disney, Dean Doherty, and Jaymi Belcher for helping with this project.

I have always loved plants and medical school provided the opportunity for me to learn more about plants and expand my indoor garden. As an Augustana College graduate, I recalled that my university gifted graduating seniors with a lucky bamboo plant. Lucky bamboo is the symbol of prosperity and good fortune, and is a living gift that requires attention and care (although it is actually very low maintenance).
On March 12th, the Mighty Docs (UICOMP's own hockey team of physicians, medical students, allied healthcare professionals, and friends, wearing white & teal) faced the Peoria Firefighters (black and red) on the ice for their annual St. Jude charity hockey game. The Firefighters came out blazing, striking fast and racking up a formidable 3-1 lead late in the first half. The Mighty Docs needed momentum heading into halftime, and got a much-needed break with a last-minute goal that left them trailing 3-2.

It would turn out to be a Tale of Two Halves, however, as the Mighty Docs returned fire and came out on the offensive, netting the 3-all equalizer that would start a streak of six-unanswered points, running up the score 8-3 in favor of the Docs. The last 15 minutes of the second half would be a back-and-forth affair, with the Docs and Firefighters trading shots and finishing 10-5.

But the true winner was St. Jude. Catching up with player Connor Rachford (M4) after the game, he thanked Docapella for performing and the UICOMP family for turning out to support their home team and do their party for charity. All funds from alcohol sales, a 50/50 raffle, and silent auction went straight to cancer research. Additionally, several residents organized a post-game celebration at Crusen's on Farmington Rd, and cover proceeds at that event also went to St. Judes, bumping the total raised to more than $6000.

Tahsin Zaman (M4)
In this section we ask you, the readers, about the student interest groups that you’re involved with. Each month, we highlight a group and find out what they do and why you should join.

In this edition of SIG Spotlight, Charlie Perez-Suarez (M1) and Bradley Pipeline SIG VP tells us more about the SIG, why it is important, and how you can get involved.

Although just a mile apart, Bradley and UICOMP can feel worlds away. The Bradley Pipeline SIG, aims to change this. The group is still in the planning stages, but the inspiration for it came from Associate Dean of Academic Affairs Jessica Hanks, a Bradley graduate. One involved student is VP Charlie Perez-Suarez (M1) another BU graduate. When asked about his experience with the two institutions, Suarez-Perez said “as a premed, I had no idea there was even a medical school in Peoria.”

According to Mindi Miller, the Regional Dean of Admissions, an average of 1-3 BU students admitted yearly, a number the group hopes to increase through mentoring and institutional partnership.

Dean Hanks emphasized the importance of mentoring in improving connections between the two institutions. “As a student, a near-peer is likely a strong advocate to help achieve your goals. It seems more tenable when someone is closer to your stage. The UICOMP SIG can offer that mentorship” said Dean Hanks.

Charlie has a similar perspective from his experiences at Bradley and applying to medical school:

“As an underrepresented in medicine Latino and first-gen college student, I wish I had a mentor throughout my premed process that looked like me. I never once had a BIPOC or Latinx STEM professor, so it was always difficult for me to picture myself in a white coat.”

The upcoming Pipeline program would provide URM premed students a mentor that looks like them, understands their experiences better, and can show that someone from a similar background has gone through this process and made it through.”

The group is also exploring the possibility of having joint one-credit courses and admissions opportunities such as a 4+4 combined program or guaranteed interviews for eligible BU students that meet predetermined requirements.

Beyond improving the relationship between the two institutions, Dean Hanks sees the program having more far-reaching effects: “my goal was to partner with other academic institutions and have students interested in Central Illinois to stay for medical school, residency, or even as an attending. Then we are helping grow area physicians. UICOMP and Peoria have a lot to offer.”

The group’s President Mike Neff encourages interested students to reach out to him: “you can come to the faculty meeting and see what other ideas exist for students to help with. Any projects that aren’t part of our current to-do list can be soaked up by the SIG and assigned appropriate chair positions.”

Grant Williams (M3)
Know of anything Pons-tacular?

We are always looking for stories, events, or accomplishments that happen around UICOMP. If you have a story you’d like to see included in the Peoria Pons, please email written articles to the Pons team. Keep all articles to 250 words or less; photos are always encouraged. Deadline: 25th of every month.

Upcoming Events

Peoria Art Guild
Ongoing Event
203 Harrison St, Peoria, IL, 61602
Check out some of the classes that the Peoria Art Guild is offering:
https://www.peoriaartguild.org/currentclasses

UICOM Tri-Campus Surgical Summit
Friday, June 24, 11am-1pm
College of Medicine West Tower 1853 W Polk St, Chicago, IL 60612
The Student Surgical Society (SSS) at UICOM-Chicago hopes this event will provide students with the opportunity to get a head start on exploring the field of surgery early in their medical careers as well as foster connections and mentorships that will last well beyond the surgical summit itself!
RSVP at the link:
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSczxomAGqg3ZHq3unSHMyuzOwlkUIFAomEgGCKKUj258SssHQ/viewform
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