

International House NY

Matthew Argame

Bridging the Gaps Between Justice, Art & Medicine to Resolve Global LGBTQ+ Health Disparities
Grenada, Lesser Antilles, West Indies

Global LGBTQ+ Health Disparities & Gateway for Global Peace & Parity: A 2020 report published by UCLA School of Law's Williams Institute titled *LGBT People and Housing Affordability, Discrimination and Homelessness* highlighted the layers of inequities that LGBTQ+ people face in the US. It showed that compared to cisgender straight adults, LGBTQ+ people experience disproportionately higher rates of familial rejection (a major factor leading to homelessness), poverty, structural and social discrimination and stigma, poor mental health and suicidality, difficulty accessing adequate healthcare and employment and many additional issues that compound each other and pervert the dignity of an individual.¹ The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic only worsened these long-standing issues for LGBTQ+ people in the US and across the globe says the Human Rights Campaign Foundation.² The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation convened a roundtable to discuss additional global LGBTQ+ challenges, such as reaching LGBTQ+ people when they are criminalized in their region (Grenada, for example), and opportunities for engagement, such as elevating in-country LGBTQ+ voices and using such voices to inform global health policy.³ St. George's University (SGU) in Grenada is an international institution with more than 8,000 enrolled students representing 100+ countries, with 77% of students attending the School of Medicine (SOM) and 11% the School of Veterinary Medicine (SVM). Most of the student body hold US citizenship (66%), the next largest student population are from Grenada (11%), and more than half of SGU's faculty/staff are citizens of Grenada as well. Additionally, SGU provides the most physicians to the global healthcare workforce.⁴ Thus, SGU is positioned to address the health disparities and social inequities that LGBTQ+ people experience on a local and global level, making peace possible for a community that experiences prejudice and violence across every corner of the globe.

Description of Project Allowing Us to Invite Peace In: I will partner with various organizations at SGU to develop and facilitate a modified Safe Zone training, called JAM (Justice, Art and Medicine) Sessions, to build a network of allies to support LGBTQ+ citizens in Grenada and LGBTQ+ people across the globe who come to SGU for study or work, while also equipping an international community of physicians-in-training with the knowledge and resources to address health disparities LGBTQ+ and other vulnerable populations experience. JAM Sessions will consist of a Health Disparities presentation, portions of the Safe Zone curriculum and a Narrative Medicine activity. We will target key groups for this summer. The first targeted group are the MD-trained clinical tutors in the SOM. Students and faculty have brought up concerns about homophobic and sexist rhetoric being used by clinical tutors during their sessions with med students which sets a precedent, on an international scale, that it is okay to use such degrading language during clinical encounters. Introducing JAM Sessions to clinical tutors during their facilitator trainings will set a new, inclusive precedent and standard of instruction. I will also target the student leaders of the 65+ student organizations on campus, which consist of University-Wide Orgs, Religious/Cultural Orgs and Special Interest Groups with the help of Andrea Blair with the Dean of Students Office. These orgs reach students beyond SOM (which has mostly US students), making JAM Sessions accessible to student-citizens of Grenada and students from the other 100+ countries represented on campus. Additionally, faculty from the SVM will be targeted to reify the importance of veterinary public health and environmental justice in our commitment to global peace. Other targeted and non-targeted groups will be reached in the long-term with the help of Robert Alig, Vice President of Alumni Affairs.

Proposed Activities: A presentation about the health disparities the LGBTQ+ community experience globally will be given before the Safe Zone portion of the training to bridge the gap between medical knowledge and social injustices, a pervasive gap informed by medical school curriculum and pedagogy and exacerbated by social and structural stigma toward LGBTQ+ people. I will be working with Dr. Jane Harrington and becoming a liaison to and member of GLMA: Health Professionals Advancing LGBTQ Equality international organization to develop the Health Disparities presentation portion of the training.

The Safe Zone curriculum will be co-facilitated after the Health Disparities presentation. Safe Zone curriculum includes 1) asking trainees to reflect on first impressions of LGBTQ+ people 2) educating trainees on common vocabulary words used in the LGBTQ+/ally community 3) educating trainees on language commonly used, especially in the medical field, that degrade LGBTQ+ people and what language to use instead 4) illustrating the LGBTQ+ acronym with the Gender-bread Person activity 5) speaking about privileges cis-gendered straight people have and (6) discussing what coming out means and how to shift the narrative to coming in. Culturally specific details will be integrated into the curriculum too. After the Health Disparities presentation and Safe Zone training, a Narrative Medicine activity will be facilitated, which includes viewing art produced by queer artist of color (such as Billy Gerard Frank, a Grenadian born, gay identifying artist who produced the gay- intersectional film *Second Eulogy: Mind the Gap*, and Tarell Alvin McCraney, an American born, also gay identifying artist who co-wrote the gay-intersectional film *Moonlight*) together, writing a creative response to it, and sharing the response to the group if one so chooses. The Narrative Medicine framework of viewing, creating and sharing art together – particularly art created by and for the people/community the training serves – reaffirms the medical necessity of allyship training and reclaims, collaboratively, a sense of our humanity, belonging and creative contributions to the world. Designing the logo, materials, website and social media platforms in a way that engages an international community will be accomplished with the help of medical illustrator Sarah Glusnitz and Grenada-based graphic designers/medical illustrators Maria Mafla & Lucia Garces. Music from Caribbean Power Jam Radio will be played before and after each JAM Session to frame the topics within Caribbean life. I have either facilitated and/or attended Safe Zone ally, VetNet ally, AB540 & Undocumented Student ally, QPR for Suicide Prevention, AAUW Start Smart Salary Negotiation, Scientific Communications and Narrative Medicine trainings/workshops, & curated TEDx Conferences, all of which inform these intersectional JAM Sessions to be hosted in the summer.

Goals & Timeline

March-April: Notice of award on **March 8**. Confirm team/roles. Sign/submit agreements by **March 26**. Develop brand identity, website and social media platforms/campaign (*Long term goal:* add project's website/social media on SGU website). Conduct literature review on LGBTQ+ health issues. Find more Grenadian-based art. Develop JAM presentation. Recruit facilitators (*Short-term goal:* recruit 4 facilitators. *Long-term goal:* recruit tenured SGU employee to act as facilitator trainer).

May-June: Execute social media campaign. Finalize/practice JAM presentation. Make publicity/activity materials. Outreach targeted groups. Schedule JAM Sessions. Facilitate SOM and SVM Tutors' JAM Sessions (*Short-term goal:* train 30 of 150+ clinical tutors. *Long-term goal:* train all tutors)

July-August: Facilitate student leaders' JAM Sessions (*Short-term goal:* train student leaders in 5 of the 40 active organizations. *Long-term goal:* central training for student leaders in every org). Continue Clinical Tutor JAM Sessions. Review/integrate feedback. Continue social media campaign

September: Conduct final trainings. Qual. analysis on feedback. Write/submit final report by **Sept. 13**.

Sustainability & Future Directions

The DPPSC will continue to meet even after the project Final Report is submitted in order to integrate the project's initiatives in pre-existing university activities & to achieve long-term goals mentioned above. I would like to eventually include LGBTQ+ people and allies of Grenada not connected to SGU, who are people that may experience the impact of structural stigma more violently. Partnering with GrenCHAP (an NGO that provides advocacy and resources for sex workers, those living with HIV/AIDS and the LGBTQ+ community at-large) would be the next step to accomplish this. I will also be attending a *GLMA Annual Conference on LGBTQ Health* as the liaison to SGU. 2021-2022 timeline made to achieve long-term goals.

Indicators of Success

Indicators of success will include adherence to timeline, budget and meeting JAM Session quotas (mentioned above). Facilitator-self feedback and participant feedback descriptive surveys will be solicited. Presentation material/format feedback will also be assessed. Qual. assessment of (+) and (-) comments in the surveys will be assessed and modifications to training will be made based on the data collected. Although JAM Sessions will likely be facilitated virtually this year, this project is crucial to prepare for peace as we come back *into* the world, changed for the better, jamming to new sounds of justice together.