

AHEC Service Recognition

How AHECs recognize students and preceptors that continually or successfully engage in AHEC services.



Prepared by

Pete Roberts
South Dakota AHEC
Clinical and Education Coordinator

February 1, 2011

AHEC Recognition Programs

The purpose of this report is to disseminate information about the Area Health Education Center (AHEC) program offices and centers in the United States that recognize the students, preceptors and sites that continually or successfully engage in AHEC services. In order to obtain as much input from other AHECs throughout the country, each AHEC listed on the National AHEC Organization website that had a valid email address was contacted. Approximately 270 emails were sent, and more than 100 responded. A search for this information was also performed on websites of AHECs in the north central region of the United States.

Student Recognition

There are very few formal AHEC recognition programs for students who participate in AHEC programming. Some informal honors include recognition of student participation in an individual event in the local newspaper or highlighting student success stories at AHEC functions.

A few AHECs utilize the Presidential Service Award through a program called Youth Health Service Corps (YHSC), an organization that is operated out of the Northwest Connecticut AHEC office. YHSC includes a service learning component, which includes community service, academic preparation and personal reflection, and students who are a part of YHSC are required to perform 50 hours of service through the program. If students exceed the 50 hour requirement and achieve 100 or more hours, they then would be eligible for the Presidential Service Award, and could complete the necessary guidelines on the Presidential Service Award website to receive an award.

In Florida, the Gulfcoast South AHEC (GSAHEC) provides a program called Recruitment and Educational Assistance for Careers in Health (REACH). Students who participate in the REACH program throughout the school year are encouraged to apply for the REACH summer internships. This is a paid job shadowing experience in health careers. The GSAHEC chooses 4-6 students each summer to participate, based on attendance in the REACH program, GPA, and an essay. Each will receive approximately \$600 for 90 hours of job shadowing/career research/career projects. The GSAHEC considers this a bit of a reward for students, as those who are selected tend to be those who have participated in many REACH activities.

The South Carolina AHEC has a statewide, four-year, academic-based program known as the Health Careers Academy (HCA) for high school students that is designed to support the exploration of, and preparation for, entry to the health professions pipeline. There is an incentive program for HCA participants, which also serves as a mechanism to determine which students will be tracked in the state's AHEC database. Students recognized at various levels of participation receive an incentive pin with a designated charm based upon their documented hours of activity:

- High school students who participate in a minimum of 20 hours of the HCA curriculum are identified as “members” of the academy and receive the



Figure 1 - The South Carolina AHEC pin

basic AHEC pin. This is determined to be the threshold where a student is truly invested in AHEC programming and will be tracked in the state database.

- High school students who participate in a minimum of 60 hours of HCA activity are identified as “scholars”. These students are eligible to receive letters of recommendations from the regional center director and/or the Health Careers program director. A red charm is added to the AHEC pin.
- High school students participating in a minimum of 110 hours of activity (accrued from participation in HCA curriculum or any other AHEC activity, including service learning, mentoring, summer programs, and more) are identified as “achievers”. Students are eligible to receive a letter of recommendation from the system’s executive director. A blue charm is added to the AHEC pin.
- HCA members who participate in a summer experience either at the state or regional level receive a yellow charm for the pin.
- Academy members who graduate from high school and prepare to matriculate into higher education are awarded a green charm to add to the pin.

In North Carolina, the Wake AHEC designates a number of hours for each of its student workshops, camps, and other activities. Students who have accrued at least 20 hours qualify as a Health Careers Scholar. Rewards include invitation to special events, such as the statewide Future Leaders in Health Care Conference. The registration fee is waived for students with Scholar status and they are given first preference to register. The weekend conference includes nationally recognized speakers and takes place on a college campus in North Carolina. These students are also given first preference to register for Mini Medical School and the Health Careers Saturday Academy. Scholar hours are also looked at when selecting students to invite to various programs, such as those with low capacity, with the intention of picking students that have demonstrated an “I want to be here” attitude. The AHEC has found over the years that some parents want their children to participate far more than the students themselves.

The Oklahoma AHEC awards students a certificate if they participate in 20 or more hours of AHEC programming in one year. The belief is that students with at least 20 hours of exploration are more likely to choose a career in their area of interest; in the AHEC’s case, health careers. The AHEC program office tracks these students so that they can be contacted on a continual basis via text message, Facebook and email.

Preceptor Site Recognition

Preceptors are honored in a variety of ways – both directly by AHECs themselves and indirectly through other affiliated parties. A few AHEC representatives stated that the universities they are affiliated with honor top preceptor sites on typically an annual basis at an annual meeting or awards presentation.

Many of the AHECs that do honor outstanding, or even all participating, preceptors do so during an annual event such as a meeting or awards presentation. Acknowledgements have included supplying preceptors with a small plaque with annual plates that are added for each year they participate as a shadowing site, writing personal thank you notes to preceptors, sending them gift cards to area retailers, a monetary award, or an article in the local newspaper. Some even reward

partners with something simple of a local flair. At the Northeast Pennsylvania AHEC, they pass out Hershey bars (the Pennsylvania AHEC program office is in Hershey) throughout the year to students, office managers, preceptors and other partners who do favors for the center.

One example of a preceptor/partner award is the AHEC Regional Center HERO Award in Colorado. Nominations are submitted through the AHEC regional staffs for an outstanding preceptor/partner who has actively participated in promoting and advancing the mission and goals of an AHEC center. The award winner is presented at the Colorado AHEC annual preceptor conference. The preceptor conference is an annual conference for the preceptors and their family to spend a weekend at a mountain resort for development, recognition and rest and relaxation.

The Capital AHEC of Austin, Texas, also has a formal preceptor award program. They recently developed the All-Star Preceptor Award. This award is intended to annually recognize the outstanding efforts and dedication of select community faculty. The first award recipients were named in fall 2010. Capital AHEC staff selected five preceptors based on various criteria, including positive student evaluations and the number of students the preceptor taught. Each of the five preceptors were presented with an engraved glass star award, along with a letter from AHEC, a copy of their student evaluations and a letter of support from the Texas Medical Association. Each preceptor and their staff were provided a lunch as well.

Three AHECs have had positive experiences with offering resources other than money to their preceptors. They recommend free or reduced price continuing education programming and access to medical library resources.