

OXIHER / EXECUTIVE STEERING COMMITTEE PROGRESS REPORT

SPRING/SUMMER 2026



XAVIER
UNIVERSITY of LOUISIANA

INSTITUTE FOR HEALTH EQUITY AND RESEARCH

The Ochsner Xavier Institute for Health Equity and Research (OXIHER), now operating under the Office of Community Empowerment (OCE) at the Xavier Ochsner College of Medicine, continues to advance work across education, community engagement, research and workforce development.

This quarter's updates highlight expanded healthcare workforce development opportunities, growing academic and community partnerships, hands-on career exploration and continued engagement with trusted community organizations.

BUILDING THE HEALTHCARE WORKFORCE

SUMMER 2026

OXIHER Catalyst Internship Program Expands Student Workforce Development Opportunities

The 2026 OXIHER Catalyst Internship Program marked a significant milestone as the first year OXIHER was fully integrated into the broader Ochsner Catalyst Internship Program. Through a strong partnership with Ochsner Workforce Development, OXIHER was able to expand participation from three interns to ten interns, creating new opportunities for students to gain meaningful experience across the health system.

Interns were placed throughout a variety of departments, including Health Outcomes and Inclusion (HOI), Xavier Ochsner College of Medicine, Information Technology, Volunteer Services, Education and Community Outreach, Nursing Education, Total Rewards, and more.

One of the strongest aspects of the internship was the opportunity to connect with professionals across a variety of departments. Whether through one-on-one meetings or larger group sessions, these conversations provided valuable insight into the many career paths within Ochsner and helped me better understand how different teams contribute to the organization's mission.

—ZARIAH MARTIN

Several interns partnered directly with HOI contributing to projects focused on food security, adolescent mental health, solutions for patient safety, smoking and vaping cessation, employee engagement, and Ochsner Resource Groups.

Beyond their departmental assignments, interns actively supported key organizational initiatives. They volunteered at New Employee Onboarding as well as representing OXIHER at the Xavier Pre-Collegiate Career Exploration Fair, where they engaged students in discussions about careers at Ochsner, internship opportunities, professional networking, and resources available to support successful transitions into college and future careers.



HOI interns Kyla George, Manaii Beckwith and Zariah Martin with Strategy Manager Dr. Ariyon C. Bryant, center right.



Dr. Kernesha Weatherly, vice president, Imaging Service Line, Ochsner Health

By expanding access to meaningful professional experiences, OXIHER and the Ochsner Catalyst Internship Program are helping cultivate the future healthcare workforce. Through mentorship, project-based learning, and exposure to diverse career pathways, interns gained valuable skills while contributing to initiatives that support the health and well-being of our communities. For HOI Catalyst Intern Manaii Beckwith, the experience also opened the door to future opportunities, including acceptance into the 2027 Ochsner Allied Health Scholars Program.

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SUMMER 2026

OXIHER Strengthens Louisiana's Healthcare Pipeline Through Growing SOAR-X Partnership

OXIHER, in partnership with Ochsner Education Outreach, continued its collaboration with Xavier University of Louisiana's Pre-Collegiate SOAR-X Program this summer, providing students with hands-on exposure to healthcare and STEM careers.

Program participation grew from 12 students in 2025 to 20 students in 2026, representing a 66% increase in scholar engagement. The growth reflects strong interest in experiential learning opportunities that introduce students to diverse healthcare professions.

Week 1: Ochsner Simulation Center

Students participated in CPR competitions, Stop the Bleed training, fracture stabilization exercises, and laparoscopic simulations while learning foundational clinical skills and teamwork.

Week 2: Flight Team and Critical Care Transport

At Flight Care-Rescue ONE, scholars explored emergency medical transport, critical care operations, and the coordination required to care for patients in urgent situations.

Week 3: Pathology and Laboratory Medicine

Led by Dr. Francis R. (Bobby) Rodwig, Jr., students examined pathology, hematology, transfusion medicine, molecular diagnostics, and the role laboratory medicine plays in patient care.

Through partnerships like SOAR-X, OXIHER and Education Outreach are helping strengthen Louisiana's healthcare workforce pipeline by connecting students with meaningful career exploration experiences and STEM opportunities.

SUMMER 2026

Building the Future Healthcare Workforce Through Partnership and Career Exploration

Building on the strong collaboration between the OXIHER and Xavier University of Louisiana's Pre-College Programs, the Xavier Ochsner College of Medicine expanded its engagement with young scholars this summer through a series of career panels. Across both the STAR and SOAR-X programs, the College of Medicine faculty, who are also Ochsner physicians, shared their educational journeys, career experiences, and insights into the day-to-day practice of medicine while answering students' questions about medical education, career pathways, and opportunities within healthcare. These conversations provided middle school, high school, and rising upperclassmen with meaningful exposure to the medical profession and words of encouragement as they explore their future goals. The SOAR-X Clinical track's physician panel, which featured physicians from a variety of specialties, was moderated by Dr. Eboni Price-Haywood, who helped guide a discussion that offered students a deeper look into the many paths available in healthcare and medicine. Special thanks to Dr. Price-Haywood for championing this initiative through her leadership in recruiting physician volunteers,



XULA SOAR-X students visit Ochsner Flight Care-Rescue ONE at the New Orleans Lakefront Airport where they learn about emergency response and critical care transport.



XULA SOAR-X students learn wound and fracture care during a half day visit to the simulation center at Ochsner Health.



SOAR-X clinical track students visit the Xavier Ochsner College of Medicine exhibit table with Jewel Harden-Barrios, gaining insight into its pathway program opportunities.

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including Xavier alumni, for all three career panels and moderating the SOAR-X physician panel, and to Dr. Veronica Gillispie-Bell, Dr. Rajiv Gala, Dr. Jesse Elliot, Dr. Maurice Sholas, Dr. Kamil Del Toro, Dr. Cecilia Brewington and Dr. Donisha Dunn (Community Physician) for generously sharing their time, expertise, and insights with Xavier's aspiring healthcare professionals.

The following day, the experience continued with a career exploration fair for SOAR X and the Achieve Dual Enrollment participants, featuring 26 organizations and departments representing healthcare, engineering, public service, research, and other fields. As a lead coordinating partner, OXIHER helped bring the event to life by spearheading planning efforts, engaging participating departments, and creating leadership opportunities for Ochsner Catalyst interns to connect directly with students.

More than introducing career options, these experiences help scholars envision their place within the future of healthcare, whether as clinicians, researchers, innovators, or Public Health leaders. By connecting students with organizational leaders, these experiences transform career aspirations into achievable goals while strengthening the next generation of talent committed to advancing the health of all communities.

SUMMER 2026

OXIHER and Xavier University College of Pharmacy Create New Pathway for STEM Career Exploration

Most students are familiar with pharmacists they encounter in a neighborhood pharmacy, but few have the opportunity to see the full scope of careers the profession offers. From ambulatory care and specialty pharmacy to healthcare operations and industry partnerships, pharmacy plays a critical role across the healthcare ecosystem.

To help students explore these opportunities firsthand, OXIHER partnered with XULA's Pharmacy Center of Excellence to launch a new STEM career exploration experience designed to introduce students to the diverse career pathways available within pharmacy and healthcare.

As part of Xavier's Pharmacy Summer Enrichment Program, high-achieving students in grades 8–12 visited Ochsner for a "Day in the Life of a Pharmacist" experience that provided direct exposure to healthcare professionals, pharmacy practice, and the many settings in which pharmacists serve patients. Participants heard from professionals representing ambulatory care, retail pharmacy, specialty pharmacy, and pharmaceutical distribution, gaining a broader perspective on the profession and its impact across the healthcare continuum.

Spearheaded by the Ochsner Inclusion Team, this first-of-its-kind collaboration reflects the power of cross-functional partnerships in advancing workforce development. OXIHER looks forward to continuing this relationship and identifying new opportunities to engage students and support the future healthcare workforce.



McKesson representative shares information on pharmaceutical distribution processes and healthcare technology solutions.



SPRING 2026

Students Tackle Community Health Challenges Through OXIHER and Xavier University Partnership

Preparing future healthcare leaders requires more than classroom instruction; it requires opportunities to address real-world challenges that impact the communities they serve.

Through a partnership between OXIHER and XULA's Division of Business, students enrolled in the Senior Healthcare Capstone course developed innovative solutions addressing priorities identified in the Greater New Orleans Community Health Needs Assessment.

Working alongside healthcare leaders and mentors, scholars translated research into actionable program designs while gaining experience in strategic planning, stakeholder engagement, and program development. The final presentations showcased three student-led initiatives: Zariah Martin's Mind Matters, focused on reducing stigma surrounding adolescent mental health and improving access to support services; Breanna Clarke and Alonja Smith's G.L.O.W. (Growing Leaders in Optimal Wellness), a family-centered nutrition initiative designed to strengthen healthy eating and food preparation skills; and Jon Notice's Bridge to Care, a community health worker navigation model connecting uninsured hospitality workers to primary care resources.

The impact of the experience extended beyond the classroom. Following her capstone work, Zariah Martin was accepted into the Ochsner Catalyst Internship and invited by Kevin Green Jr., VP of Clinic Operations and Community Health, to interview for a school-based smoking and vaping



XULA Business HCMT Capstone Final Presentations. Pictured (L-R) Kevin Green Jr., VP, Clinic Operation, Ochsner Health; Jon Notice, business student, Steven Crimaldi, strategic program manager, Ochsner Health & HCMT mentor; Breanna Clarke, business student; Alonja Smith, business student; Dr. Karen Wyble, AVP, Community and Public Affairs, Ochsner Health & HCMT mentor; Dr. Cathy Rehfus-Wilsek, professor

education consulting opportunity. Upon successful completion of the internship, she will advance into a new one-year contract position with the Smoking Cessation Team, where she will educate students in schools throughout the region using innovative, youth-focused smoking and vaping prevention materials and presentations that she has helped develop.

Additionally, through the guidance and mentorship of Steven Crimaldi, Jon's engagement evolved into an ongoing mentoring. Their continued connection reflects OXIHER's commitment to fostering relationships that extend beyond a single touchpoint. Moreover, sustained engagement demonstrates how mentorship can accelerate professional growth, expand networks, and create lasting opportunities for future success.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & VISIBILITY



Tracey Murry, PhD, licensed clinical psychologist, Psych-Oncology at Ochsner Health, joined families and community members at the RoA brunch focused on those impacted by gun violence.

SPRING 2026

Rock of Ages Circle of Courage Brunch: Legacy of Love: Honoring the Lives That Still Speak

On Saturday April 4, Rock of Ages Baptist Church opened its doors not only for celebration, but for healing. As part of the church's ongoing partnership with OXIHER, about 200 congregants, many of them families who have lost children to gun violence, gathered for a panel discussion on grief, trauma, and recovery.

The panel featured Tracey Murry, PhD, of Ochsner Health and Maria Nix, MSN, BSN, RN, of the Office of Professional Well-Being, Ochsner Health. Together, they walked

attendees through what trauma looks like after violence, what "normal" reactions can feel like in its aftermath, and coping skills people can use in the moment. Murry and Nix also shared evidence-based approaches to health promotion and stress management and offered clear guidance on when and how to seek additional support.

A key focus of the conversation was access. Panelists highlighted low-barrier trauma support services available across New Orleans, giving families concrete, actionable next steps rather than abstract advice.

This event reflects the deeper aim of the OXIHER-Rock of Ages partnership: building a faith-based health ministry rooted in trust, shared governance, and whole-person care.

SPRING 2026

5th Annual Men's Health Event with Zulu Social Aid & Pleasure Club

On Saturday, May 30, Ochsner partnered with Johnson & Johnson and the Zulu Social Aid and Pleasure Club for its 5th Annual Men's Health Event, drawing over 110 participants for a morning focused on education, prevention, and community engagement. This year's panel, led by Chief Community Medical Officer, Yvens Laborde, MD, alongside colleagues from cardiology, neuroscience, and urology, centered on the connections between prostate, brain, and heart health, with Zulu members actively engaging around prevention and wellness.

This event is another clear example of our community engagement framework in action: meeting people where they already are, in spaces they trust, rather than asking them to come to us. Just as the Rock of Ages partnership builds health engagement through an established faith community, the work with Zulu builds on the same underlying principle: durable health impact grows out of relationships with the institutions communities already belong to, not around them.



Dr. Yvens Laborde, MD, chief community medical officer, Ochsner Health, joined fellow specialists in a panel discussion on men's health.

SPRING 2026

Strengthening Community Connections at The Links' Emerald Experience

Xavier Ochsner College of Medicine proudly served as a sponsor of the 2026 Emerald Experience, hosted by the Pontchartrain Chapter of The Links, Incorporated. The fundraiser supports youth programs, HBCU engagement, and health and human services initiatives. The College of Medicine hosted an exhibition table, connecting with attendees and sharing updates about the college. Valuable connections were also established with professionals interested in supporting future OXIHER mentorship opportunities.



Xavier Ochsner College of Medicine representatives included: Jewel Harden Barrios, Melvenia Martin, Dr. Tamika Webb-Detiege, Dr. Eboni Price-Haywood, Dr. Bennetta Horne, and Danita Wickwire