Dear UT College of Pharmacy Colleagues,

The Art Galleries at Black Studies (AGBS) would like to express its enthusiasm for our collaboration with Dr. Skyller Walkes, UT College of Pharmacy’s Assistant Dean of Diversity and Inclusion, and Assistant Professor of Instruction in the Division of Pharmacy Practice, this coming fall. Through her initiative “Interrogating Race, Gender, Class, and Sexuality through Art in Decolonial Art Spaces for Future Pharmacists,” Pharmacy students will explore how artists name the oppressive structures that harm Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). Dedicated to the underrepresented narratives of the Black Diaspora, AGBS is comprised of dual gallery spaces – the Christian-Gallery and the Idea Lab – that serve as platforms from which to unpack timely social issues and injustices. As the education coordinator for AGBS, I’ve witnessed how experiential learning within the galleries has left an indelible mark on students and their education. Through a partnership with AGBS, Pharmacy students will develop decolonial thinking strategies that will aid in their development as health science professionals.

By incorporating AGBS’ exhibitions and extensive collections within the curriculum for “Interrogating Race, Gender, Class, and Sexuality through Art in Decolonial Art Spaces for Future Pharmacists,” students will be invited to question the rhetoric that they hold around social identities. In Their Own Form, our latest exhibition dedicated to Afrofuturism, technology, and science-fiction, features over 13 artists from across the Black Diaspora who grapple with histories of oppression and subjugation in order to reimagine decolonial futures. Artwork from our permanent collection of over 100+ contemporary art objects also gives voice to artists within the Diaspora who disrupt dominant historical narratives that often neglect BIPOC. This holding includes an array of prominent creators, from the modern American artist Charles White’s images of everyday Black people, to the contemporary collages of Austin-based artist Deborah Roberts. Working with our exhibitions and collections, students will be introduced to new aesthetics and visual forms that will allow them to bring their own insight to the work, while also challenging their preconceived notions of race, gender, class, and sexuality.

We are particularly excited to continue partnering with the health sciences, as these engagements have been particularly rewarding for students and their professional development. In the spring of 2020, we worked with Theatre and Dance Professor Katie Dawson’s class, Drama/Theatre Applications in Museum Settings, to facilitate a virtual conversation around racial inequity within healthcare for a group of nursing students. Analyzing artwork from In Their Own Form, the students considered how the healthcare industry has systematically neglected BIPOC who seek help from healthcare practitioners. Their reflections after the online exercise speaks volumes:

“Prior to this experience, I knew about racial inequities in care through statistics, but hearing actual experiences was so moving. I thoroughly enjoyed the performance …Nursing and the arts may seem very different, but this performance showed how different professions can work together to bring attention to an issue.”
“Knowing that discrimination and racial bias happens every day not only towards the patients, but also the nurses, is horrible to think about. The narratives made me even more aware of these injustices and made me an even stronger advocate for those who are being unfairly treated in the healthcare setting.”

AGBS is excited to partner with Dr. Walkes as she develops “Interrogating Race, Gender, Class, and Sexuality through Art in Decolonial Art Spaces for Future Pharmacists.” Now, more than ever, it is imperative that health science professionals think through ideas of decoloniality. As the above reflections demonstrate, introducing art as a tool for thinking through forms of structural oppression comes with great benefits for students, asking them to think beyond statistics that risk flattening and stereotyping the experiences of BIPOC.

As the upcoming semester approaches, AGBS continues to gauge our gallery operations. During the fall, we will be open to the public during our operating hours, Tuesday through Saturday, from 12-5pm, and by appointment. We continue to offer digital resources to visitors online through our website, galleriesatut.org, and through our latest online initiative titled The Narrative, at the the-narrative.org.

Sincerely,

Kendyll Gross