

DLHS Research Snapshot

Alexandra Vinson, PhD, Studies Culture to Innovate Medical Education

“The healthcare system and our health professions will continue to change over time. My research contextualizes these changes as historical phenomena, helping us understand the possibilities and limits of innovation”

The Problem: The American medical profession is constantly adapting to changes in culture, politics, technology and epidemiology. This creates challenges and opportunities for both medical training and health systems, as their structures and cultures must constantly evolve. Using qualitative methods, Vinson investigates the changing conditions of medical training and the development of novel healthcare systems to discover how professional cultures shape the pace and direction of innovation.

KEY WORDS

Culture
Education
Community
Infrastructure
History
Professions
Innovation

The Promise: By studying how culture works, we discover clues about how to change it so that we can build a more just world. In the future, we will have a medical profession that reflects the diversity of our patient populations and we will have healthcare structures where patients have real power in setting agendas for clinical care and research.

The Project: Vinson was awarded a 2-year grant from PCORI (Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute) to study the process by which new Learning Health Systems are developed. The “Field Study of Care Innovation: Transforming Health Care Systems into Learning Networks” project is a longitudinal qualitative study of four Learning Networks and the Coordinating Center that guided them in their development. The goal of the study is to describe the social elements of these Learning Networks: their culture, leadership practices, patient involvement, etc. to advance the theory of how Learning Health Systems work. This research responds to calls in the field to build a “social science of solutions” that attempts to understand social institutions—such as healthcare—so that they can be reimaged and improved.



Learning Health System in Action: Because Learning Health Systems are still very new, there is much to learn about both the information technology needed to make a Learning Health System work and about how people come together to build and operate these systems. Vinson’s research helps us understand Learning Health Systems as communities of people doing shared work to improve the healthcare system and the health and quality of life of patients.

Cultivating Community: Together with colleagues, Vinson has built a community of scholars who study health professions education: *the Sociology of Health Professions Education Collaborative*. Through hosting conferences, organizing panels, offering networking events, and an engaged twitter community, they bring together researchers working on health professions education. By being in a scholarly community with each other, they are better able to identify important questions of interest and to move the field forward together.

The Bottom Line: Using qualitative methods, Vinson investigates the changing conditions of medical training and the development of novel healthcare systems to discover how professional cultures shape the pace and direction of innovation.

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