

ROCK HILL, SOUTH CAROLINA – A class of Winthrop University biology students has created comic books for use in middle schools on three contemporary health issues.

The comic books will be presented on Monday, April 12, starting at 1 p.m. at the DiGiorgio Campus Center in what is billed as a Red Carpet event. Local school officials and others will be invited.

The Winthrop Biology Department, under the leadership of Biology Professor and Chair Dwight Dimaculangan, partnered with the South Carolina AHEC and National Library of Medicine to include the comic book project as a component of the Bench to Bedside: Introduction to Health Professions course series.

The 10 Winthrop students, working in a course taught by biology adjunct professor Angelica Ellman Christie, selected current topics – post traumatic stress disorder, super bugs and asthma. The comic books will be unveiled on April 12, along with a video of the Winthrop students' reflections.

The main goal of the project, said Christie, is to teach course enrollees about awareness and knowledge of basic health information while cultivating their skills to enter health-related professions. Another goal is to recruit college students for health care professions.

Additionally, middle school students are targeted as the audience to improve their awareness of population health topics. The Winthrop comic books will later be made available to area middle schools and possibly doctor offices.

"The college students learned to work together to talk to topic experts and then health professionals so they could write a realistic story line," Christie said. "Part of the challenge was to write stories on a middle school age level and make it interesting and informative."

Each of the three comic books has the same three characters – Vanessa, a cool high school student with ambitions to go into health care; Brian, a geeky student with tape on his glasses; and Rx, a lab rat who talks to Brian and Vanessa.

The Winthrop students who took the class would love to see positive results once the comic books are distributed. "My hope for this comic book is to help spread awareness on PTSD and for people to know that it is treatable," said biology major Cassidy Hess of Jackson, South Carolina. Another student, Manuel A. Ortega, said the project was an awesome experience. "It truly helped me dive into the topic," said the Lake Worth, Florida, resident. "One of my brothers has asthma, so I really relate to the topic."

Previous comic books with the same characters and different topics have been used in Lowcountry high schools since 2014, Christie said. This is the first Winthrop student group to lend their expertise.

Dimaculangan has been a big advocate for the AHEC in South Carolina and encouraged this course at Winthrop, Christie said. Other universities also plan to offer a similar course, as well as technical colleges.

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