

## Introduction

Racism continues to prevail in higher education and conventional diversity initiatives that only center around tolerance training and supporting resources are marginally effective in making lasting and impactful change on university campuses. Professional associations, such as Association of American Medical Colleges have issued statements addressing and eliminating racism and called for transforming rhetoric into action and provided a framework<sup>1,2</sup>. The American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACP) had not only reaffirmed its commitment to foster an inclusive community, and vowed action against racial injustice<sup>3</sup>. Naming and/or calling out racism, however, does not ensure equity and inclusive excellence. Institutions of higher education, therefore, must play a critical role in eroding the culture of silence around racism and promoting equitable learning environment for all, particularly for students of color. To that end, the Council of Deans at Texas A&M University (TAMU) has launched a new initiative, the **Deans CARE** (Deans Committed to Anti-Racism Efforts) Internship Program, which focuses on promoting diversity and strives for inclusive excellence. The Rangel School of Pharmacy (RSOP) had embraced this initiative and recruited the inaugural Deans CARE interns in the fall of 2021.

## Objectives

The overarching goal of the Deans CARE Internship program is to support and bolster TAMU's progress towards creating a vibrant climate for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). The specific objectives of the Deans CARE initiative at RSOP are to:

- Engage student interns actively in the process of setting/refining the DEI mission statement of the RSOP;
- Connect interns with DEI networks in the School, Health Science Center, TAMU, and peer institutions;
- Empower interns to participate and lead DEI related projects in education, outreach, research, and scholarship (e.g., addressing health disparities, minimizing access to care, and improving quality of care for all);
- Promote diversity and social equity through peer interactions, advocacy, resource acquisition, social media, and website upkeep.

### Specific Aims of the Inaugural Deans CARE Interns and Cohort (Deans Care Interns, AY 2021-2022) are as follows:

- Propose a DEI mission statement
- Analyze DEI statements of peer institutions
- Enhance visibility through School website and social/print media

### Student Learning Outcomes

- Examine the literature related to DEI statements
- Synthesize the common elements of DEI statements
- Propose a DEI statement for the Rangel School of Pharmacy
- Recommend ways to enhance the website
- Present at appropriate venues
- Reflect on DEI in the workplace and profession

## Method

Selection of **Deans CARE Interns** at RSOP is through a competitive application process. Selected students are provided an opportunity to serve for one or two-semester(s) as **Deans CARE Interns** and work with college/university leaders to engage in activities that build a culture of inclusion, diversity, equity, and accountability (often called DEIA). Interns also work to promote diversity within the academic environment, workforce, caring for diverse patients or populations, and address inequities that contribute to health disparities.

## Process Outline

- The paid Deans Care Internship program was announced in May 2021 and applications were sought from interested students from both doctoral (PhD) and professional degree (PharmD) programs.
- An Advisory Committee was established to review applications and provide recommendations to the Dean for final selection.
- Three interns (two from PharmD and one from the PhD program) were selected in August 2021.
- A supervisor was named to oversee the program and guide interns on a regular basis.
- Diversity training was offered to all interns by the Advisory Committee through appropriate resources/venues.
- Interns were presented opportunities to work independently as well as collectively to work on the specific charged aims.
- Bi-weekly meetings with interns were held with the supervisor and monthly meetings with the Advisory Committee.
- A mid-point check was conducted by the Advisory Committee to ensure progress and completion of project goals.

## Deans CARE Interns



**Alyssa Sarmiento**  
P1 Student  
Laredo, Texas



**Nada Helal**  
PhD Candidate  
Alexandria, Egypt



**Tiffany Miles**  
P3 Student  
Killeen, Texas

## DEI Mission Statement

**Original DEI Statement**

The policy of the Texas A&M Rangel College of Pharmacy is to ensure equal opportunity. The Texas A&M Rangel College of Pharmacy, in compliance with applicable federal and state laws and regulations and national accreditation requirements, does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, age, religion, handicap, or status as a veteran in any of its policies, practices or procedures. This includes employment.

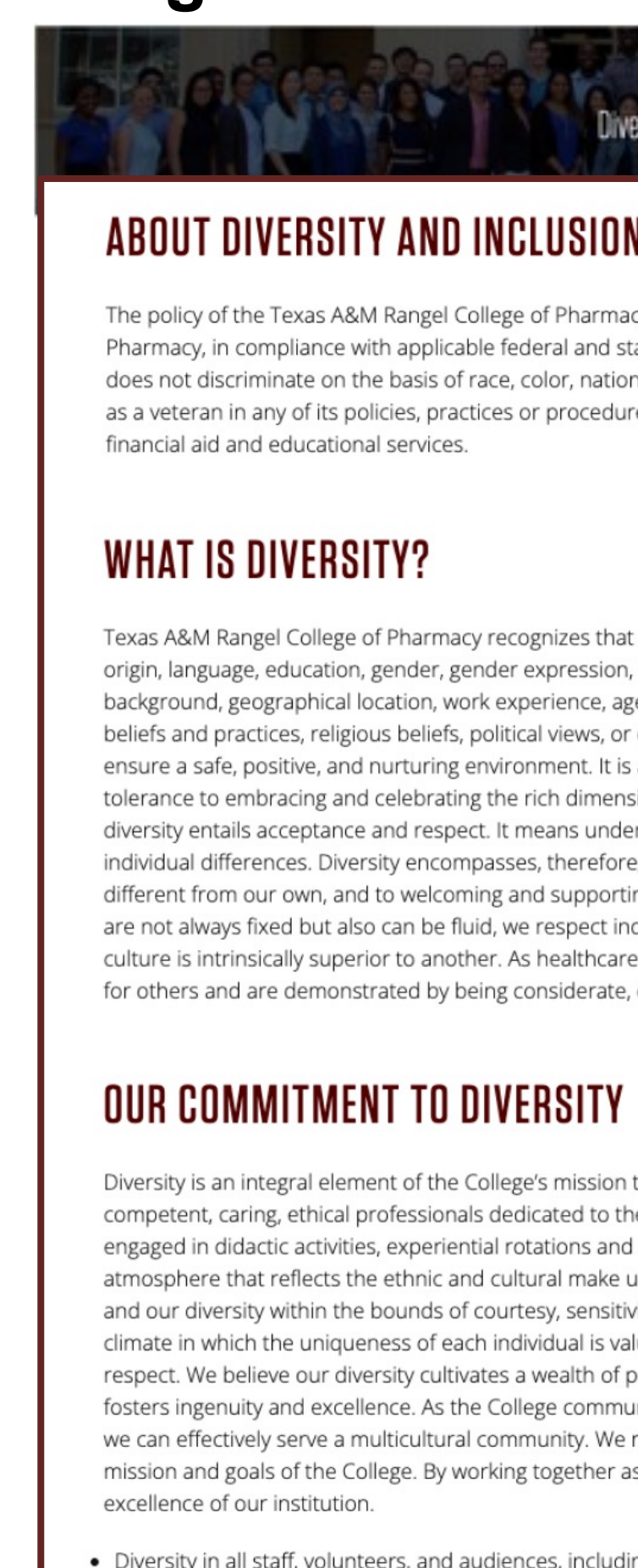


**Revised DEI Statement**

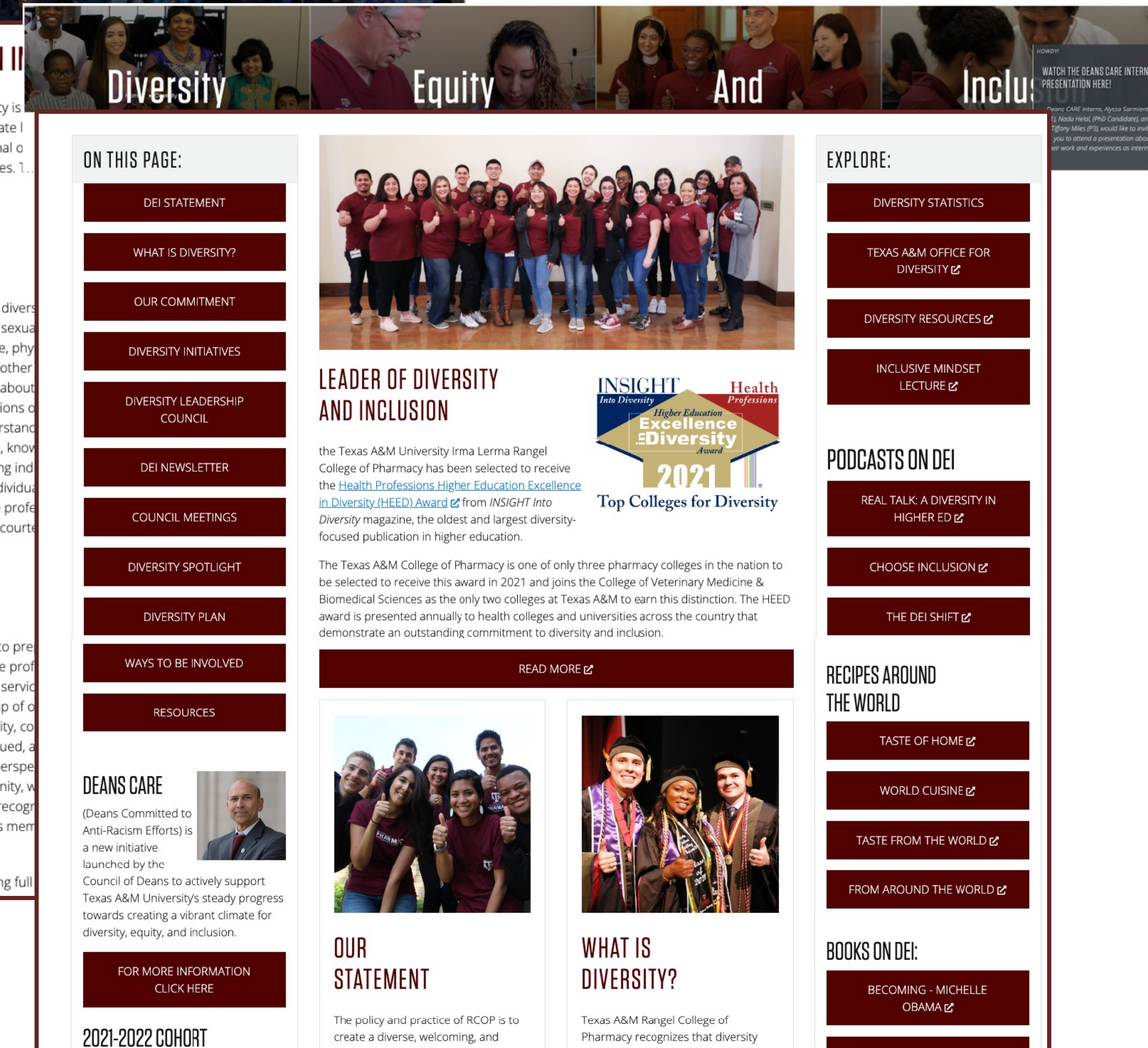
The policy and **practice** of the Texas A&M Irma Lerma Rangel School of Pharmacy (RSOP) is to create a **diverse, welcoming, and inclusive environment**, and to ensure an equal opportunity for everyone. RSOP, in compliance with applicable federal, state laws/regulations, and national accreditation requirements, does not discriminate based on race, color, **ethnic, cultural identities**, sexual orientation, age, **gender identity or expression, religion or spiritual identity, physical and mental abilities, work experience, family status, political views, socioeconomic** or status as a veteran in any of its policies, practices, or procedures. This commitment includes but is not limited to **recruitment, admissions, hiring, employment, financial aid, and educational services. As Aggies, we respect, recognize, and promote diversity, equity, and inclusivity, and strive to promote them in all that we do. Through our commitment to diversity and inclusion, we are committed to preparing students, training faculty and staff, and equipping our 'pharmacy' to assume roles in leadership, responsibility, and service to society, thereby improving justice and equitable practices in the ever-evolving world of healthcare.**

## Website

### Original DEI Website



### Revised DEI Website



*I wish for students to feel they are part of the Aggie family and that they are fully supported, heard, and respected by their colleagues, professors, and staff.*  
Nada Helal, PhD Candidate

*I wrote a letter to a representative and through that, I felt that it was already paving the way toward the future.*  
Alyssa Sarmiento, P1 Student

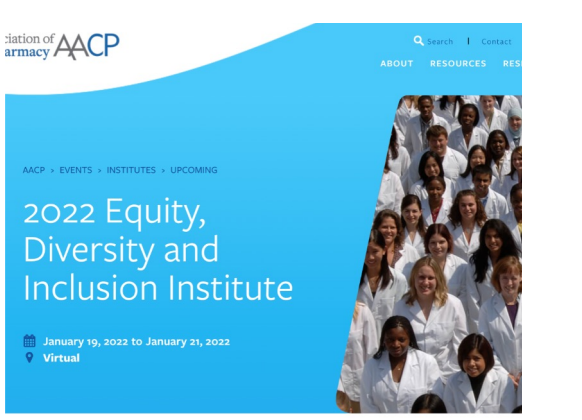
*I felt it was a great way for me to develop skills that would help me in the future make a change in other people lives.*  
Tiffany Miles, P4 Student

## Results

- In fall of 2021, the school had successfully recruited the inaugural intern cohort comprising of one student from the graduate (PhD) program and two from the professional pharmacy (PharmD) program.
- Interns actively engaged and took ownership of their project and worked together to revise/refine DEIA statement for the College of Pharmacy, which was reviewed and endorsed by the College and university leadership.
- Interns successfully completed their annual project goals, which included updating the college website, providing recommendations to enhance visibility, and acquiring resources that are helpful for creating vibrant communities.
- Interns attended the AACP Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Institute in 2022.
- Interns participated in the TAMU annual Deans CARE Summit, took part in the panel discussion, and presented their collective work.
- Interns made a presentation to the entire student body in spring 2022, summarizing the results from their project.
- At the conclusion of the project, interns self-reflected their internship journey.
- The school leadership has approved the use of 'Former Deans CARE Interns' designation for students who have successfully completed this new internship.



Zoom Meetings & Team Gathering



AACP EDI Institute, 2022



Deans CARE Summit

## Significance & Conclusions

- Deans CARE project activities led by the interns gained more attention and appreciation from the entire student body, as well as faculty and staff at the RSOP.
- Intern presentation at the RSOP Forum was well attended and well received.
- Self-reflections of interns were overwhelmingly positive and indicated a great level of satisfaction with the Deans CARE Initiative.
- The online traffic on the diversity website has increased by more than two-fold and is continually rising.

The more schools/colleges engage and support students with inclusive practices and activities, the better prepared the institutions are to enhance receptivity among all stakeholders, which helps to create and foster a culture of inclusive excellence. It is our fervent hope that *Deans CARE Interns* will view themselves as not only ambassadors for DEIA principles for the RSOP, but also as future champions of the diverse and inclusive workplaces and communities they will inhabit and enhance after graduation. The School is committed to continue this program and expand the scope of the internship to include addressing inequities that contribute to health disparities and advocating for cultural humility and competence.

## Reflections

### Gained Leadership Roles

- Office for Diversity Student Diversity Advisory Council (SDAC) at Texas A&M University – Tiffany Miles
- The Maroon & White Leadership Program at Texas A&M University – Nada Helal
- Kingsville Liaison for Cultural Diversity Committee [CDC] – Alyssa Sarmiento



*I am so proud of these interns for what they have accomplished in just a few months. I applaud them for their commitment and dedication and for their fortitude in working together as a team.*  
Dean Indra Reddy, PhD

## References

- Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), Addressing and Eliminating Racism at the AAMC and Beyond, June 1, 2020
- Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), Statement on Dismantling Racism in Academic Medicine, February 23, 2021
- American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACP), Confronting Racial Injustice by Athena Ponushis, October 2020.