Greetings from the Director

by Karen Lutfey

Greetings Public Health students, and welcome to our inaugural PBHL Student Newsletter! In these pages, you will find all sorts of current information about the PBHL program, including announcements, student columns, and showcases profiling special courses and internship opportunities. We hope you find this a useful tool for being in touch with the PBHL program and staying informed about your growing major.

First, let me introduce myself. My name is Karen Lutfey, and I am the new Director of the undergraduate major in Public Health. I am a sociologist by training, and Associate Professor in the Department of Health and Behavioral Sciences. I joined UC Denver in Fall 2012, taking over where Professor David Tracer left off (thanks to Dr. Tracer for leaving things in such good shape for the rest of us!).

Did you know there are over 250 declared PBHL majors on campus? This makes you a rapidly growing major, and we are working hard to make the program grow with you.

Some developments for this Spring semester:
- Effective Spring 2013, we will be offering all seven of the core PBHL courses each semester
- Effective Spring 2013, there is an option to graduate with Honors in PBHL (to be eligible, you must have a GPA of 3.5 overall and at least a 3.7 in PBHL courses)
- This semester, we will be actively involved in the annual UCD Research and Creative Activities Symposium, to be held in late spring (see page 4).

- We are hosting a PBHL DESIGN CONTEST! Submissions are due April 1, 2013 (see sidebar).

Also included in the newsletter:
- Recent PBHL graduate Abe Nowels tells us about his post-graduate plans in our year-long “Graduate Spotlight” segment
- Current student Brianna Lopez interviews Professor Meng Li in our “Meet Our Faculty” column
- Current students Amy Hale and Brecken Kellogg report on their study abroad trip to Guatemala over winter break
- Graduate student & PBHL advisor Karen Hampanda interviews Professor Debbi Main in our “Beyond UCD” feature
- PBHL Club update
- Soccer for Success internship opportunity
- Important contact information about our PBHL graduate advisors and other program staff

We look forward to another great semester, and thank you for making PBHL such a great program!

PBHL DESIGN CONTEST

We are inviting submissions for a new, student-created PBHL design! The winning design will graphically represent and integrate all 5 aspects of public health: epidemiology, global, social, environmental, and policy, and will be used in a variety of PBHL contexts, including schwag. The winner will be determined by a panel of PBHL faculty and students. The first place prize is a $100 gift card, and the runner-up will receive a $50 gift card. The due date is APRIL 5, 2013. We look forward to your submissions!
Graduate Spotlight

featuring Abe Nowels

Abe Nowels graduated this Fall with a major in Public Health. He has graciously agreed to check in with us this year to tell us about life after PBHL.

KL: Congratulations on graduating, Abe! We are all very excited for you, but of course parents and professors are usually that way and sometimes for students it’s more of a mixed bag. How do you feel about being done?

AN: Well as I write this, I’m actually in the middle of preparing for finals, so I suppose graduation isn’t necessarily a forgone conclusion, haha - but thanks! I’m very excited to be done - I think for most of us there is a sense of nervousness about what’s next, but mostly it’s that nervous excitement you get before you try anything new.

KL: Now, you took some time off before coming to UCD and becoming a PBHL major, right? Can you tell us a little about what you did before, and what your plans were when you came to this major?

AN: Sure, well I was actually an English major of all things at CU Boulder and took some time off to go see the world a bit. I ended up in Alaska for three years where I worked on a fishing boat, volunteered as a firefighter/EMT and worked as a case manager at a community mental health center. Eventually I decided it was time to finish up my degree and I think by then I had engaged enough with the outside world (and especially our health systems) to realize that I wanted to be involved directly with something beneficial to society. Don’t get me wrong, analyzing poetry is important and all, but public health just felt like a great fit.

KL: And so what are your plans for the time being? I understand you have some work lined up here at UCD.

AN: I do, I’m very excited to be one of the TAs for the Intro to Epidemiology course this spring. Epidemiology was one of my favorite areas of public health, and was so helpful in terms of being able to really unpack the true meaning of studies we read in other classes. Also it’s great to be able to call B.S. on the “revolutionary” new studies we hear in the news all the time.

KL: What kinds of options are you considering for the coming year? Are you considering graduate school?

AN: I’m definitely considering graduate school. Graduating in the fall can be a bit tough if you’re not 100% sure where and what programs you want to apply right out of the gate, because the deadlines are all right away. My plan for now is to take time to study for the GRE (and maybe the LSAT) and really do a lot of research into what programs are out there. I’d like to find out exactly what professors in different programs are studying and maybe try to make contact with those that sound most interesting. In the meantime I’ll be trying to find work in the field (and if relevant work proves hard to find, volunteer options). I’m hopeful that this will give me enough direction that when the next wave of applications are due, I’ll have a great idea of what’s out there and where I want to apply.

Meet Our Faculty

by Brianna Lopez

Some of you have already met Dr. Meng Li, who taught Health Policy for the first time this semester, but for those students who have not she is a new professor who just joined UCD this year.

Dr. Meng Li, originally from Beijing, moved to the United States in 2002 to pursue a PhD in Cell Biology at the University of Alabama in Birmingham. She later realized that she did not like working in a lab very much and eventually moved into the field of socio-psychology; she then received a PhD in Psychology. Her psychology research focused on health questions in decision making: how people make their health decisions and how we can possibly affect these decisions. Dr. Li just moved to Colorado this summer and is looking into starting a new course about health decision making. This course would look at how our health related decisions can be affected by other factors and our own bias that we might be unconscious of. The health decision making course will hopefully be offered next fall listed under special topics.

While looking for jobs she realized that her research did not fit into a traditional department since her interests are inter-disciplinary. What attracted her to UCD was the variety of backgrounds many of the faculty have. She not only liked how everyone came from different backgrounds but also how they all complemented each other. So far she is very happy with her decision in joining UCD!

In 2010, she published a paper “How Do People Value Life.” Her advice to all students is to never give up their dreams. If you see her around campus say hello or stop by her office, she has a lot of interesting research she would love to share!
Taking Neighborhood Health to Heart (TNH2H) is a community-based participatory research (CBPR) initiative involving ongoing community-based projects and research in neighborhoods in and around the former Stapleton airport. Dr. Debbi Main, an active researcher with this initiative, sat down with me to discuss some of the potential opportunities for current undergraduate students majoring in public health and those who have recently graduated from UCD. For one of its current research projects, TNH2H employs PBHL undergraduates and recent graduates as data collectors and data analysts. These positions typically last several months to a year, and provide an invaluable experience for helping students advance to graduate school or begin a career in public health.

As a data collector or data analyst, students are exposed to the scientific research process and community-based participatory research, including survey design, sampling, working with US Census data, and interpreting and disseminating findings in partnership with the community. Next year, data collectors will also learn more about qualitative methods, such as conducting and analyzing interviews and focus group discussions. Required skills for these types of positions include the ability to work with diverse populations, strong interpersonal skills, attention to detail, and being comfortable with epidemiology and statistics (you don’t have to be an expert!). Ability to speak Spanish is always a huge plus as well in areas such as Denver. Opportunities like TNH2H can substantially build your capacity to be a strong applicant for a master’s or doctoral program or move on to another more advanced position. TNH2H involves numerous partners and organizations throughout Denver, including Anschutz Medical Campus and Denver Health -- places that also offer job opportunities for UCD public health graduates. In my experience, the more people you know and the more connections in the field you can make, the better your chances of landing a sweet position in public health. For more information about Taking Neighborhood Health to Heart visit http://www.tnh2h.org.

What is the difference between the Bachelor of Science (BS) and the Bachelor of Arts (BA)?

Because many public health students are interested in going into medicine, the BS was designed to fulfill medical school requirements including all of the necessary math and science courses (i.e., calculus, organic chemistry). The BA was designed for those students interested in either immediate employment in the field of public health after graduation or intending to apply to a Master of Public Health (MPH) program.

When are PBHL courses available?

As of spring 2013, all required PBHL courses (e.g., Intro to Public Health, Environmental Health) are now offered both in fall and spring. PBHL electives however vary from semester to semester. As of right now, none of the PBHL courses are offered during summer sessions. Please check your registration portal or meet with a public health advisor for available courses.

Do I need to do an internship as part of my public health degree?

No, the department does not require an internship though some of the courses do require students to gain some experience outside the classroom as part of the curriculum.

When should I take Capstone Experience (PBHL 4099)?

Capstone Experience should be taken your senior year.

What kinds of jobs are available for public health graduates?

Many of the public health jobs are with the local and state departments of public health including jobs in disease control and prevention, epidemiology and data analysis. Additionally, public health professionals work in hospital settings, research organizations, and academic institutions.

For additional advising questions please contact our Graduate Advisors, Ernesto Moralez at ernesto.moralez@ucdenver.edu or Karen Hampanda at karen.hampanda@ucdenver.edu.
Trip to Guatemala
by Amy Hale & Brecken Kellogg

Earlier this month ourselves and seven other students from a variety of undergraduate and graduate programs traveled to rural Southwest Guatemala to study sustainable development and health care with Dr. Jean Scandlyn and Dr. John Brett. As a group we had two parallel objectives, the first was to study how people organize in the absence of a civil society and the other objective followed up with a rapid needs assessment that occurred in the Fall of 2011 in partnership with the Center for Global Health and one of the local banana plantations, Banasa. This partnership aims towards the betterment of health for the community and the employees of Banasa.

Our research gave us insight into the socio-cultural struggles that this community faces and the overwhelming link between health and environment. The community leaders that we interviewed in our research overwhelmingly noted the problems associated with the floods that come every year during the rainy months. The public health concerns that was associated with flooding included contamination of personal wells with human waste from unsealed latrines, numerous diarrheal diseases, and loss of productivity on personnel agricultural plots. As a group we were able to assess and analyze some of the public health and environmental concerns in these communities through interviews and analysis of field notes.

The basic step toward improving health at a population level begins with sanitation, drinkable water, hand washing and containing human waste. While these precautionary measures are second nature in developing countries, this field school experience was a glimpse into the lives of those who still struggle with these problems. Our experience was a reminder of the importance of the key factors in breaking the chain of illness as ways to prevent illness.

As future public health practitioners, this experience made us reconsider all of our preconceived notions of global practices in public health in developing communities. We learned that sometimes it’s not about achieving some sort of ideal model but first seizing at what is attainable and working from that point forward.

PBHL Club Updates
by Odelia Yashari

The Public Health Club is an academic student-run organization that provides students opportunities to engage in professional and student development activities, community service, and social activities. The purpose of the club is to further interest in public health for students, teach them about public health, promote community service, help undergraduate students gain networking opportunities, and inform students about careers in public health.

During regular meetings, the plan is to take a combination of approaches in giving students solid exposure to the multi-faceted nature of public health including guest lectures, film screenings, and student run discussion forums, and more!

Outside of meetings, we can do everything from outreach at fairs, all the way up to professional and clinic site visits. In between these poles, we are looking to more firmly establish social and community service opportunities here in Denver. We encourage all UC Denver students and organizations to contact us if you have any comments, suggestions or interest in collaborating for health-related events, programs or projects.

Soccer for Success
by Sara Stanley

Soccer for Success is a free nutrition-based afterschool program that uses soccer as a tool to combat childhood obesity and promote healthy lifestyles for children in under-resourced urban communities. This past spring the Colorado Rapids Youth Soccer Club and America SCORES Denver were awarded a grant by the U.S. Soccer Foundation to run Soccer for Success for 1,200 children in sixteen Denver and Aurora Public Schools. The program runs for twelve weeks in the fall and twelve weeks in the spring. Children are provided with a healthy snack immediately following school dismissal, then transition to a 90 minute soccer practice three days per week. Not only are these children given a safe place to play during the afterschool hours, but they are also paired up with a positive adult mentor. Each coach is provided with a Soccer for Success curriculum that includes nutrition points and detailed soccer games for each practice. If you are interested in being a mentor, soccer coach and teacher to a young person in our Soccer for Success program please submit your cover letter and resume to Jamie Alvarez at jamie@rapidsyouthsoccer.org.

The mission of the undergraduate major in Public Health is to train students to think critically in addressing public health's greatest challenges.