



Stony Brook Program in Public Health

Alumni Newsletter
Volume 2, Winter 2021

Director's Message

Greetings and warm wishes, alumni, and our affiliates. It is only the start of the third month of 2021, and I already feel like it is the longest year on the heels of the hardest year of our lifetime. Here we are, lapping the first year since the pandemic changed everything we do and how we do it, and through it all, our profession has shown overwhelming dedication to promote and protect the public's health. The toll on humanity is enormous and the drain mentally, physically, and emotionally is evident in every aspect of our daily lives. Yet, I see countless acts of empathy and an unwavering willingness to give 1000%. You can be so very proud of the work of public health researchers, practitioners, and educators. We pivoted to meet the needs and demands for new kinds of research, new ways of teaching, and new approaches to connecting with communities seeking evidence-based information, access to resources, and solutions to new problems. We are truly fortunate to have the opportunity to contribute to public health improvements.

As you know, our faculty, staff, students, and alumni have worked intensely over the last few months to assist in countless ways to improve both public health and the education of our amazing students. We heard in February that the Commission on the Accreditation of Healthcare Management Education (CAHME) has approved our Master of Health Administration and also the Health Policy & Management concentration of the Master of Public Health degree programs as accredited, a milestone for Stony Brook, as the first and only CAHME accredited programs in the SUNY system. The MPH is up for accreditation renewal by the Council for Education in Public Health (CEPH) (every 7 years, and 2021 is our next re-accreditation year), which will culminate with a virtual site visit by a team of external evaluators in April of this year. We successfully celebrated the graduation of 2 students from the PhD in Population Health and Clinical Outcomes in 2020. Faculty, staff, and students transitioned to virtual events that had to be re-imagined very quickly in response to social distancing and de-densification policies (such as the Class of 2020 graduation, practicum presentation poster day, and new student orientation, to name a few). We have an exceptional group of dedicated professionals holding so much of what we do together and students who are adapting, flexing, and doing what it takes to complete their degrees against all odds.

We are happy to share that interest in public health and healthcare is on the rise. The PPH entering class of 2021 is the largest we have enrolled, doubling our classes for the MPH program (60 new students). The MHA exceeded its enrollment goals due to high demand and excellent candidates. In total, we welcomed 90 new students across all degree programs. I was able to highlight this to *Newsday* in a recent article along with two of our students (including those in the MSW/MPH dual degree program in which we accepted 14 new students this year). Access to this article is available at [this link](#).

While vaccine administration is expanding daily, the acceptance rates are not nearly where we need them to be (including among health care and other essential workers on the front lines). We see a light for a hopeful future, but no doubt there is still much to be done. We will continue to educate the public health workforce to make improvements in the lives of those

around us and advocate for public health programs that are inclusive, culturally competent, and equitable.

PPH has many ways for you, our precious alumni, to continue to contribute to our program. We need you. Please think about how you can be a part of the continued success and of the PPH and its student community. Would you be interested in serving on a committee? Would you be available to be a career mentor for our current students? Also, please share your ideas for how PPH can continue to provide you with educational and professional development opportunities. Do you have an idea for a continuing education workshop, seminar, event, or networking opportunity? We want to hear from you, learn from you, and make a difference. Please be in touch by emailing us at publichealth@stonybrookmedicine.edu.

Thank you for your continued support of the PPH.

Sincerely,
Lisa Benz Scott, PhD
Director, Program in Public Health

Program News



Figure 1. PPH Staff with Student at ID Badge Pick Up Event

Welcome Class of 2022!

We were unable to get our new student photos this year but were still able to have a great orientation with our new students. We had some excellent Zoom break-out sessions where students were able to get to know each other. While this year's orientation was done remotely, the PPH staff were able to meet some of our new students at our ID and iPad pick up day in August. We set up a tent, masked, spread out, had some ice cream, and greeted new students. The Mickey Mouse ice cream proved to be a favorite.

MHA and MPH HPM Earn CAHME Accreditation

This past December, the PPH participated in several intensive days of a virtual site visit with the accreditation body, Commission of the Accreditation of Healthcare Management Education (CAHME), for the initial accreditation for the Master of Health Administration Program and the MPH Health Policy and Management Concentration. The CAHME Board met on February 17 and approved the accreditation of our programs. The PPH wants to recognize the amazing efforts by Dr. Julie Agris, Dr. Jeff Ritter, Krista Gottlieb, as well as advisory board members, affiliates, alumni, and our entire faculty and staff team who participated during the self-study writing and site visit.

MPH CEPH Re-Accreditation

The MPH program is under review for reaccreditation by the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH). We invite you to take part in our re-accreditation process by reviewing our self-study document. You can obtain a copy of our self-study document on our website at the following link: <https://publichealth.stonybrookmedicine.edu/about/accreditation>

You may submit comments about the MPH directly to CEPH until March 15, 2021. You may send written comments directly to CEPH at the following address: submissions@ceph.org.

Program in Public Health Mentoring Opportunities

We are pleased to announce that we are launching a mentorship program for our PPH students in collaboration with Stony Brook University's Alumni Relations. We have already received a number of responses from our alumni who are interested in mentoring our current students. We will be working in the coming weeks to do some mentor matching. It is not too late for you to participate. If you are interested in participating, please complete this [survey](#).

Calling for Nominations for the Norman H. Edelman Alumni Achievement Award

The Edelman Award is an endowed fund which can only be awarded to public health alumni. It was started in the spring of 2015 with a generous gift by Dr. Edelman and named in his honor to recognize his legacy as the person who created the program during his tenure as Dean of the School of Medicine and Senior Vice President of the Health Sciences. Several other individuals have given generously to support this award, including members of the faculty and senior administration. We are excited to recognize a deserving alumnus at the virtual synchronous graduation ceremony planned for this coming May. Please don't be shy about self-nominating and applying for this opportunity. We really want to honor our graduates and showcase our alumni accomplishments. Applications should be submitted no later than April 2nd. Visit [here](#) for award criteria and further information. We look forward to receiving your application.

Annual Giving Day

Stony Brook University's Annual Giving Day was on October 8, 2020. The Program in Public Health once again met its participant goal with 47 total participants. We were able to raise \$5,000 towards scholarships for our students. The money raised includes challenge gifts that were generously offered by Dr. Lisa Benz Scott and Dr. Ken Kaushansky. We want to thank everyone who participated last year. Save the date for this year's giving day, which will be on April 21.



PPH Participates in the AHA Heart Walk

From September 3 to October 3, PPH faculty, staff students and alumni participated in the American Heart Association Virtual Heart Walk. The team, Prancing Pumping Hearts, participated virtually and held a few socially distanced walks together. The team logged over six million steps during the challenge.



Figure 2. PPH Participates in Heart Walk



Job and Conference Announcement Emails

The Program in Public Health has recently launched an email communication group to send out job and conference announcements to all alumni and current students. We hope this will become a valuable resource to our alumni and students. If you have a job, webinar, speaker series or conference announcement, please send it along to publichealth@stonybrookmedicine.edu to include in future announcements.

Catching Up with Our Alumni

Dr. Nima Sarmast (DDS/MPH, Class of 2014), wants to share some words of encouragement for our students and fellow alumni.

“I am very proud of all of you and I have had the privilege of witnessing your tremendous success throughout the years. I commend you all for the dedicated work that you do, thank you for being role models for future generations of public health graduates of our program. Since our graduation in 2014 I’ve had several exciting professional experiences that I’d like to share with you. Starting in 2014, I started by serving as Assistant Professor of Periodontics and various academic leadership roles including Program Director in periodontics for The University of Texas Health Science at Houston, School of Dentistry. I am currently serving as dental faculty at both NYU Langone and UCLA in Los Angeles, CA. Many of the research projects I have been working on are now published and presented and I have had the great privilege to attend training and becoming a fellow of the AAL Institute of Teaching and Learning and recipient of the AAP Award for Outstanding Teaching and Mentoring in Periodontics. After completion of my second dental residency, I also started my own company and currently offer dental specialist consulting services for clinics across California. I wish you all the best of continuing success in your professional and personal lives.”

- Nima Sarmast, DDS, MS, MPH, MSD, Specialist Dentist, Periodontist and Endodontist

Kadhambari Sridhar (MPH, Class of 2012) shared the following with PPH:

“The COVID-19 pandemic brought me back to public health recently working on contact tracing and community health for the Fairfax County Health Department. We are one of the few counties in the nation that house community health workers in addition to contact tracers to stop the spread of the virus. As a deputy supervisor for the division, I oversee a staff of 70 amazing frontline health workers diligently keeping people in isolation or self-quarantine once they have been identified as a positive case or contact. I did not imagine this year would have me driving around the county delivering basic assistance (food, medication, hygiene supplies), donning PPE and testing people who lack access to healthcare, and seeking out resources among community-based organizations to sustain the support for the most vulnerable. This role has given me a renewed sense of belonging in the public health field and I wish to thank my PPH family- professors, staff, and my fellow classmates who continue to push me to perform at my best.”

- Kadhambari Sridhar, MPH, Assistant Program Manager for Fairfax County Health Department

Student Stories

- This year, Stony Brook's **Organization of Public Health Students and Alumni** organized a virtual food drive. They worked with the Harry Chapin Food Bank to solicit donations from students, alumni, faculty and staff through an online portal. Their goal was to reach 200 items and they exceeded that goal. Congratulations OPHSA!
- MPH student, **Maylene Navarra**, has been working on one of the COVID-19 vaccine trials while completing her practicum requirements. Maylene said that *"the MPH has prepared me for the field of public health."*
- **Yun Zhang**, PhD Student, has had a first author paper accepted and has presented at several virtual conferences as first author under the guidance of her mentor, Dr. Sean Clouston. Her recent work includes:

Papers

- **Y Zhang**, J Yang, W Hou, H Arcan. Obesity Trends and Associations with Types of Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviors in U.S. Adults: NHANES 2007-2016 (accepted by Obesity in September 2020; DOI: 10.1002/oby.23043).
- GE Romanos, J Lau, **Y Zhang**, W Hou, R Delgado-Ruiz. Macro-geometry and Bone Density Control Over the Primary Stability of 6mm-Implants. An In-vitro Study (accepted by Int J Oral Maxillofac Implants in October 2020).

Conferences presentation

- **Y Zhang**, G Natale, S Clouston. "Social network structure and dementing processes." Alzheimer's Association International Conference, Online, USA; July 2020.
 - **Y Zhang**. "How do Social Network Changes and Cognitive Decline Correlate?" Professional Interest Areas (PIAs), Alzheimer's Association International Conference, Virtual, USA; July 2020 (presented in Three Minute Thesis Competition).
- **Gabby Brauner**, MD/MPH student, was quoted in USA Today discussing the misinformation on social media regarding COVID-19 vaccines. That article can be read [here](#).
 - **Halim Kaygisiz** was recently promoted to Quality Assurance and Compliance Officer at The Economic Opportunity Council of Suffolk, Inc. Over the past 10-plus years of employment there, Halim started off as an outreach worker for SAMHSA and OMH federal grants providing case management to substance users and formerly incarcerated people while also providing HIV and Hepatitis-C testing to his clients. During Halim's career at EOC of Suffolk, he moved on to be an Outreach Program Coordinator, a Program Supervisor and ultimately a Program Director. He has worked with and helped develop programs for his organization that are part of NYS's Medicaid Redesign plan and DSRIP. Halim's most recent role at EOC of Suffolk was to connect eligible individuals to funds directed at assisting Suffolk residents who experienced financial difficulties during COVID such as rental and utility arrears and other expenses. He also supervised a food delivery program for EOC of Suffolk clients during that time. Halim will graduate with the MHA Class of 2021 and will start as the Quality Assurance and Compliance Officer at EOC of Suffolk. Congratulations to Halim and the Class of 2021.

- On November 7, two teams of MHA students participated in Seton Hall University's Healthcare Planning & Marketing Society of New Jersey Virtual Case Study Challenge. Each team had to research and then present a consultative response to a complex case that included a focus on strategic planning, marketing, and policy related to a health care organization and its financial challenges and COVID-19 responses. The teams received outstanding reviews by the judges who were industry executives and academic leaders in health administration. Team A included **Nicole Crawford, Halim Kaygisiz, Vanessa Austria-Cange, Benjamin Gabriele, and Sandi Rubi-Fuentes**. Team B included **Melissa Depaola, Connor Leszczuk, Khadijatu Muhammad, Jessica Maguire, and Malasia Coriolan**. Dr. Ritter, Associate Director, MHA Program, congratulates the participants: *"We want to thank you and congratulate you on your outstanding performances in the case competition. Both teams were impressive and performed very well. All your hard work, research, and practice paid off. The presentations were solid, your responses to the judges were perfect, and you worked very well as a team. We are proud of your work! Both myself and Dr. Agris watched you shine and deliver for Stony Brook. I want to thank our leadership, faculty, and staff for being an important part of your success."*
- The organization, Healthcare Leaders of NY, provides scholarships to students in healthcare leadership. We want to congratulate and highlight two of our MHA students who were selected for these scholarships. **Melissa Minsky** earned the HLNy Achievement Award of Distinction Scholarship and **Kadijatu Muhammad** earned the Leonard Achan Sr. Health Equity Scholarship. For more information about these awards and about HLNy please visit [here](#).

Graduates are encouraged to share any new positions and promotions by emailing publichealth@stonybrookmedicine.edu. We look forward to hearing your accomplishments.

Faculty & Staff News

Our faculty and staff continue to assist with media and outreach efforts to inform vulnerable populations about COVID-19 prevention, as well as assist with the interpretation of data, forecasting, and developing new research protocols. Faculty and staff also provide community outreach on a variety of topics to the general public.

- The Program in Public Health in association with Stony Brook Medicine and Stony Brook University Alumni Relations held a webinar titled "The Flu and You" that was moderated by **Dr. Lisa Benz Scott** and panelists **Dr. Lawrence Eisenstein**, Nassau County Health Commissioner, and **Dr. Gregson Piggott**, Suffolk County Health Commissioner. **Dr. Héctor Alcalá** provided real-time Spanish translation for the duration of this event. It was well attended and so well-received by both commissioners that they have agreed to do additional webinars in the future.
- Congratulations to staff members, **Cathy Polster** and **Christine Ziman**, both recently received their Masters in Higher Education Administration from Stony Brook University!

- **Héctor Alcalá** has been appointed as the Faculty Diversity Ambassador for the Department of Family, Population, & Preventive Medicine.
- **Lisa Benz Scott** has been elected to the Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health (ASPPH) Board of Directors as an at-large member and will serve a three-year term. The ASPPH is the voice of academic public health. PPH became a founding program member of ASPPH in 2014 joining a select group of CEPH-accredited schools and programs of public health. There are very few Program of Public Health representatives and even fewer public institution representatives on the Board of Directors. We are so happy for her to be elected to this role to represent the interests of Programs of Public Health to the larger organization.
- **Sean Clouston** received a \$7.9 million federal grant to continue his work with the World Trade Center first responders. The five-year grant from the National Institute on Aging will examine the evidence of brain biomarkers, similar to those with Alzheimer's disease, in more than 1,000 first responders being treated by the university's WTC Health and Wellness Program, which is headed by Dr. Benjamin Luft. For information about Dr. Clouston's most recent achievements please visit this [link](#).
- **Wei Hou** has joined the Core Faculty of the Program in Public Health. He continues to teach Biostatistics I and II for the program. Dr. Hou's research career has concentrated on biostatistical methods applied in the health sciences, particularly in genetics and clinical trials. He has also focused on applying advanced biostatistical methods to various health science research projects on topics ranging from HIV to ocular conditions such as myopia and glaucoma and cancer research. His methodological research has focused on Statistical Genetics and Clinical Trial Design. He is also involved with collaborative research providing biostatistical expertise to a variety of projects. We are delighted to have Dr. Hou as a member of our Core Faculty, for more information on his recent accomplishments please visit this [link](#).
- **Andrew Flescher** and his wife welcomed a baby girl, Raya this summer. In addition, Dr. Flescher recently was elected to serve as Vice Chair of the Organ Procurement and Transplant Network (OPTN) Ethics Committee of the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS). Read more about Dr. Flescher and the OPTN [here](#).
- **Olga Morozova** has joined the faculty as an Assistant Professor this summer. Dr. Morozova earned her Ph.D. degree in Epidemiology from the Department of Epidemiology of Microbial Diseases at Yale School of Public Health and completed her postdoctoral training at Yale Biostatistics. Originally from Ukraine, Dr. Morozova received her M.S. degree in the application of mathematical modeling in social sciences from the National University of Kyiv. Dr. Morozova is committed to global health and has a background in public health research and practice. Prior to starting her PhD training, Dr. Morozova worked as a strategic information expert at the National HIV and Tuberculosis control programs in Ukraine. Dr. Morozova is interested in quantitative methods in infectious disease epidemiology, in particular causal inference in the presence of contagion. Her applied research focuses on policy modeling with a particular emphasis on the interaction between opioid use disorder and infectious diseases. Recently, Dr. Morozova is actively involved in COVID-19 research.

- **Jeff Ritter** has joined the PPH as an Assistant Professor and Associate Director of the MHA Program. Dr. Ritter has over 30 years of experience in health care administration, marketing, management consulting, and executive leadership. Dr. Ritter has over 12 years of experience as a professor, researcher, and academic advisor and has extensive teaching experience in in-person, hybrid, and online platforms. In addition, he has years of experience creating, designing, and implementing online courses and developing curriculum in the health sciences. He has published research papers and has presented in both national and international conferences. Born and raised in the Bronx, Dr. Ritter has been in leadership roles, served on various boards, and is dedicated to quality education.
- **Amy Hammock** has presented at two conferences this year. In October, she presented a paper entitled “At the nexus of advocacy and policy to address sexual assault: How campus personnel navigate (around) federal requirements” at the American Public Health Association’s Annual Conference (Virtual). Just last month she presented “Where people disagree is on what fair actually looks like: Balancing the rights of victims and accused in campus sexual assault cases” at the Society for Social Work and Research Conference. For a list of Dr. Hammock’s most recent publications see this [link](#).
- **Jaymie Meliker** received a \$1.8 million federal grant to study metal-nutrient mixtures in epidemiologic and toxicologic Studies of cardiovascular disease. Dr. Meliker is serving as an expert witness for Sher Edling LLP in their lawsuit representing Suffolk County Water Authority vs Dow Chemical and other chemical companies with regard to 1,4 dioxane contamination in drinking water. Dr. Meliker continues to serve NIH IRAP grant review panel and in 2020 served on USEPA’s Science Advisory Committee on Chemicals. Congratulations Dr. Meliker on these exciting opportunities.
- **John Rizzo** was recently named the Associate Director of the PhD Program. In addition, you can view Dr. Rizzo’s recent publications at this [link](#).

Alumni Spotlight

This section will highlight a story from a PPH alumni in their own words. This issue’s story comes from Rebecca Dreyer (MPH Class of 2017).

“I am grateful for the opportunity to share my professional journey following my graduation with my Master of Public Health in 2017 and my current community work. After graduating, I worked as a Substance Abuse Prevention Specialist in Suffolk County, providing evidence-based programs in schools and conducting community needs assessments. I came to the realization that this was not quite the right path for me. I decided to go back to school for clinical social work with the hopes of providing psychotherapy to trauma survivors and to work with communities to address trauma-related issues. I graduated with my Master of Science



in Social Administration (Master of Social Work-equivalent) from Case Western Reserve University and received my Licensed Master Social Worker professional licensure.

After seeing the devastating effects of the pandemic on the community, I wanted to use both public health and social work approaches to address the resulting trauma and stressors. I am currently working as a crisis counselor and doing public health outreach for EAC Network, a provider agency for NY Project Hope, a COVID-19 crisis counseling program. We offer free, anonymous, and confidential crisis counseling to anyone suffering from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in Suffolk County through our helpline. Our trained crisis counselors provide emotional support, implement evidence-based coping skills, and give the caller a safe space to process their stressors. Some of the topics we help individuals with include anxiety, grief and loss, stress related to unemployment, and food insecurity. We also offer public education sessions and support groups to the community to raise awareness and help with stress management. In addition to the crisis counseling, we conduct assessments and provide referrals for longer-term interventions and resources.

It is no surprise that as this unprecedented pandemic continues, there is a growing mental health need. It is my hope that there will be a cultural shift, resulting in less stigmatization of mental health problems and more individuals will seek needed mental health care. By implementing this program, we hope to raise awareness and normalize the emotions and somatic presentations of the constant stress and collective trauma that we are experiencing. If you are struggling, you are not alone. I encourage you to reach out to our services and receive support. We are here to listen and help. Our helpline (516-510-0282) can be reached Monday through Friday 8am-8pm and Saturdays 8am-4pm.”

Student Spotlight

This section will highlight a story from a PPH student in their own words. This issue’s story comes from Gabriella Pandolfelli, a second year MPH student.



“During my first semester at Stony Brook University, I received the opportunity to work with Dr. Benz Scott on the Healthy Libraries Program (HeLP). When I first started working with Dr. Benz Scott, I primarily was searching for peer-reviewed research articles on public libraries and health. I would annotate these articles and write literature reviews with the goal of creating an organized library of previous research involving public libraries as a place for health promotion. While I was working on that, faculty supervisors from the School of Nursing, the School of Social Welfare, the Program in Public Health, and the Health Sciences Library came up with the idea for an interdisciplinary experiential learning experience in public libraries. This idea later became HeLP. Once the planning process for the first pilot program began, I was asked to step into the role of program coordinator for HeLP. As a founding member, I had a significant role in creating all program procedures, training, assessments, documentation and quality assurance protocols in collaboration with a team of faculty and community-based supervisors from different departments at Stony Brook University and the Suffolk Cooperative Library System.

As the program continues, I serve as a liaison to partnering public libraries' leadership and student interns who participate in the program. I also help to schedule all program events and create program descriptions and manage all data collection procedures. Working with the Suffolk Cooperative Library System who is our community partner has also allowed me to be exposed to a number of library staff trainings on topics including Alzheimer's and Dementia, Mental Health Resources in Suffolk County and Narcan training presented by community organizations. HeLP was intended to be an in-person program with students placed in public libraries which would allow for face-to-face interactions with public library patrons. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the program has evolved to offer similar services virtually.

HeLP has not only allowed me to gain experience managing a community health program but has also allowed me to work on various other research projects that are centered around public libraries. I have collected pre and post intervention data derived from the implementation of HeLP. Using these data, the faculty supervisors and I have evaluated HeLP as an interprofessional team-based learning opportunity for health professional students using both quantitative and qualitative data analyses. I have also worked with other students to perform a needs assessment of food insecurity, mental health, and drug abuse in proximity to public libraries in Suffolk County. The results from these needs assessments were presented by Dr. Benz Scott and I to the Public Library Directors for all of Suffolk County. I also collaborated with another public health student and faculty supervisors from HeLP to complete a content analysis of Master of Library Science curricula nationally as a means to prepare public librarians on topics related to social and behavioral health-related patron needs.

Working as part of HeLP has given me invaluable experience in not only managing a community health program but also has allowed me to work on other research projects that center around public libraries and the social-behavioral determinants of health. As HeLP continues to grow and expand my role as the program coordinator of HeLP also changes to fit the program's needs. HeLP as an interdisciplinary program has allowed me to work with other disciplines within Stony Brook University while making a positive impact in the community. I am excited to continue working with this program!"

Share your news

We want to provide you with a newsletter with information that you are interested in reading. Please share your news with us so that we can include you in our next newsletter as an Alumni Spotlight. Please feel free to send us a message at: publichealth@stonybrookmedicine.edu



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