



University of California, Berkeley School of Public Health

INTERDISCIPLINARY MPH PROGRAM ALUMNI + STUDENT NEWS

Spring 2017

ALUMNI UPDATE

Mara Alexeev MD, MPH

I will tell almost anyone that I feel like one of the luckiest people in the world, and evidence of that is that I didn't even really choose to come to UCB, I happily stumbled onto it. However, to those who are debating on whether or not to go to the school of public health, and on the interdisciplinary program in particular, as an alum I can wholeheartedly endorse the program. The resources, professors, other students, and the nearby communities are phenomenal.

Two of my favorite classes at Berkeley were Impact Evaluation and Mass Communication in Public Health. Just alone those two courses dramatically shaped how I think about doing good work in my new community. It isn't enough to want to do good, you have to actually make it happen--and not in



the feel-good sense, but in the hard-numbers-and-sound-statistical-analysis sense, and I am grateful that I got a year to learn and think differently about what I thought I knew about public health and medicine. It feels like I could spend a lifetime learning new techniques, practicing new skills, and reading about other people's work, but there does

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Mara Alexeev *Continuing from previous page*

come the time when you have to venture out in the real world to do the work you care about.

After graduating from Berkeley in Spring 2016, I embarked on an amazing 4 month adventure around the world. My husband and I traveled to Italy for a month, then I hunkered down at Middlebury College in Vermont for 8 weeks taking an intensive Russian Language course, and finally we moved to our new home nearly 2400 miles away from UC Berkeley: Maui!

I took a position as an outpatient pediatrician in Hawaii, and every day I notice how my MPH has changed how I practice and my goals for my practice in the future. For example, while reading through the state of Hawaii's and Maui County's public health reports on childhood mortality and morbidity, I realized that oral health needed to become a major part of my practice.

In a recently released report, Hawaii's children have the worse oral health in the nation when it comes to tooth decay. With my public health background and

medical background, it is so helpful to understand that the problem goes beyond an individual's brushing habits and what I could feasibly influence in the clinic; it depends on access to dental care, policies on who is allowed to put sealants on children's teeth in Hawaii, knowing that the water isn't fluoridated in Maui, and identifying which parts of the community disproportionately bear the burden of disease.

When I was in graduate school, I would frequently get the question from other physicians about what I was doing getting an MPH. How was I gonna use that!? Frankly, now I can't imagine working in the medical field without a solid background in public health. Understanding why certain public policies are in place, how and why they were created, and how they influence your day-to-day work is an immense asset for any clinician. Knowing policy history gives you the power to imagine a world with better systems and healthier communities. And it gives you the power to implement a change that incorporates wisdom from other successful and unsuccessful projects. 🌀

STUDENT UPDATE

Victoria Boggiano

MD & MPH Candidate

What a whirlwind the masters in public health program at UC Berkeley has been so far! Every day, I am meeting and learning from interesting faculty, students, and staff from all different backgrounds, interests, and regions of the globe. In the eleven-month program, things move quickly, but the support from our advisors and fellow classmates is unmatched. We're all getting involved in fascinating research on a diverse array of topics, and because our Interdisciplinary cohort isn't too large, we get the chance to know what just about all of our peers are doing for their thesis projects.

I didn't always know that public health was in my future. When I first began my graduate career at Stanford Medical School in Fall 2013, I knew



I would likely want to take some time off during my years there. I thought I might do a Ph.D., or take a year to live and work abroad. But during my first fall quarter of medical school, I had the chance to join a community health center that

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serves patients in an underserved part of Mountain View, California. I spent one afternoon a week for the next three years working with patients from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds who came to the clinic for their primary healthcare. I worked and learned from dedicated family doctors, pediatricians, OB/GYNs, nurse practitioners, and others who had devoted their lives to improving the health of these patients. And I quickly learned about the incredible need for community-based research to address some of the real healthcare challenges that patients and providers at this and other community health centers in California and across the country face on a daily basis. A career in public health seemed like a logical path to try to build community-based solutions to some of the challenges these patients face, and coming to Berkeley has confirmed that public health is the right fit for me.

I naively thought that medical school had prepared me for what the masters in public health would be like. I couldn't have been more wrong! In medicine, we find ourselves becoming very proficient at what diseases look like from an individual, patient-level perspective. I can listen to a patient describe his or her symptoms in clinic and quickly come up with a list of possible diagnoses that might be the culprit. That is a completely different skill set than trying to understand disease pathology on a population level. Thinking big-picture is new, challenging, and exciting. I am now really beginning to appreciate what public health can teach us about people's behavior and possible healthcare solutions.

Every day, my mind is expanding as I try to imagine what it means to tackle problems like an epidemiologist. Where do we go to investigate the source of an outbreak? How do we build a case definition, generate and test hypotheses, and come to some sort of useful conclusion? When we want to look back in time at what's happened before, how do we generate or find existing data? These and many more questions are now swirling around in my head. I know that this year is going to change not only the way I think about researching health problems, but also how I interact with patients at a community health center or hospital in my future career.

I've also been able to pursue my interests in global health here. The Center for Global Public Health at

UC Berkeley holds exciting, innovative forums and lectures from global health leaders across the state, country, and world. There was a forum a few weeks ago about updates on the Zika virus, and next week Jason Corburn and Lee Riley, who wrote the book *Slum Health: From the Cell to the Street*, will be coming to speak at the UC Berkeley campus. There is a global health track we can join, to engage with other students who are interested in global health and to help us find courses to take at the School of Public Health. Even though our program is eleven short months, CGPH has helped me gain the global perspective to public health that I'd been hoping to achieve this year. And I'll be making use of our five week winter break to travel to Vietnam and work with the Hanoi Medical University on some public health projects in northern Vietnam.

Overall, I feel really lucky to be at UC Berkeley for my MPH this year. We are supported to follow our interests down whichever path they take us. I know that the friends I'm making here will be life-long, and I can already list several people who I look up to as mentors. I'm excited to see what the rest of the program will bring! 🍷

Upcoming Events

Interdisciplinary MPH Spring Visit Day

March 20, 2017

Please visit <http://sph.berkeley.edu/>
for more details."

Save the Date

Spring 2017 Interdisciplinary Program BBQ

April 15, 2016, 12-4 PM

Codornices Park Area 2

located 1201 Euclid Ave, Berkeley

Christine Wu

MD, MPH Candidate

I am currently a master's student and resident in the Preventive Medicine and Integrative Healthcare Residency Program through the California Department of Public Health. The past several months have been such an incredible whirlwind; I may possibly have learned something new every hour that I have spent on campus thus far. I am not just referring to the weekly “Biostats” quizzes and “Epi” homework nor the gazillion papers, memos, and case studies that are suddenly all due at the same time. Rather, I am constantly stimulated by the buzzing minds on campus, from both the young and the more experienced. I can't seem to contain my excitement when I listen to new developments in the field of Epigenomics from Dr. Barcellos, draw DAGs (directed acyclic graphs) with Dr. Rose over lunch, be captivated by Dr. Catalano weighing the benefits of cognition in behavioral theories, debate the classifications of the International Agency for Cancer Research with Dr. Harrison, haggle over BATNAs (best alternatives to a negotiated agreement) in Dr. Oxendine's “Effective Public Health Negotiations” class, or simply “om” in meditation in “The Happiness Advantage”. Throw in a bunch of brilliant classmates from across a spectrum of ages, titles, and career paths whom I now call my friends. I am absolutely thrilled to be at UC Berkeley!

We are all shaped by defining moments in our lives. A critical juncture in my own was when I decided this year to return to work after a long hiatus caring for family. For decades, I was a student, then an anesthesiologist, a mom, and then a community organizer. Ever since I could remember, I focused on reacting to a disease – treating illnesses that happen to my patients, to my family, and to myself. The ideas of psychosocial health seemed too far-fetched to my Western-trained mind, despite the awareness of the deep history and teachings of my Eastern ancestors. It wasn't until several years after I overcame a major illness of my own that all the things my mother had repeated to me since I was a child surfaced in my mind. What I had perceived as nagging about the importance of eating well and



sleeping “until full,” as translated from Chinese, are actually the basic building blocks to strengthening our immunity and preventing illness.

Every day, as I walk through campus, I marvel at the similarity of the gently flowing creek to my favorite hike to Cascade Falls in Marin, how the canopy of the towering pines and redwoods near Haviland Hall are just like the parts of the Big Trees Trail in Joaquin Miller Park that I explore regularly, and how these strolls through campus are akin to walking meditations. I think about how each of us bring our own amazing life experiences to the work we pursue and the accomplishments we achieve here. Similarly, our individual genetic variations, what make each of us unique and why we don't necessarily all get sick with the same exposures, is why we need to focus our efforts on prevention and integrative modalities to improve health.

Returning to the classroom after nearly a decade out of the academic environment is a lavish adventure I would recommend to anyone. I cannot help but feel grateful for the inspiration to be more than what I initially set out to be, to persist in seeking out how to become the most effective health advocate I can be for my community. That, and I relish my student perks! I found the secret Eschelman Meditation Space to recharge, the Student Parent Center for a microwave, the free massage chairs at the Tang Center for fifteen minutes of bliss, and

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Christine Wu *Continuing from previous page*

a large HIIT (High Intensity Interval Training) class in the Recreational Sports Facility to blend in and sweat. Eleven months is too short; I have only one semester left and must now make the hard choice of “Eat, Think, and Design” with Dr. Kris Madsen and Dr. Jaspal Sandhu or eat and think at my required course with Dr. George Rutherford and Dr. James Seward (and design in Jacob’s Hall maker

labs on my own).

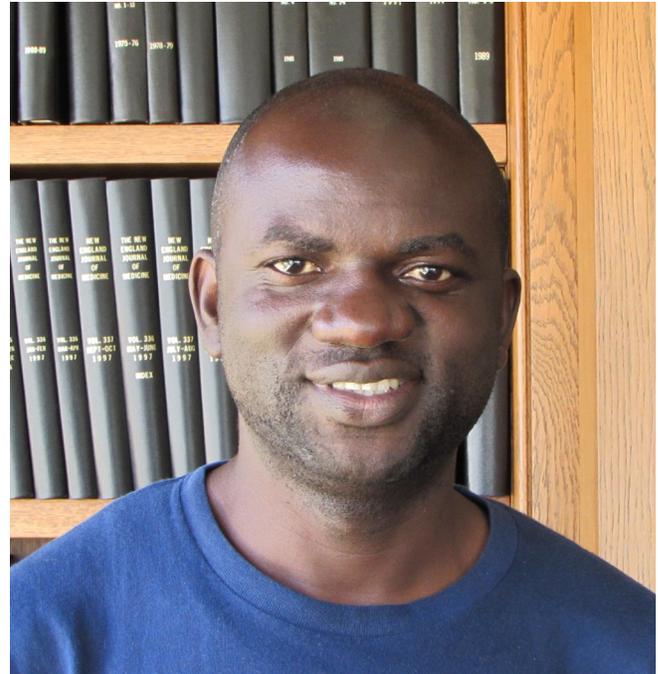
If you are ready to reinvent yourself (again), the Interdisciplinary Master’s in Public Health Program at UC Berkeley’s School of Public Health is the place to be. My metamorphosis is nearly complete. I don’t want to stop rediscovering myself here and neither will you. 🌀

STUDENT UPDATE

Jesse Ninmol MD, MPH Candidate

Since I was young, I knew I wanted to help people. This passion led me to pursue a medical degree in my home country of Nigeria. My training was put to use working for a non-profit organization funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). I worked primarily in HIV care and treatment, and in providing comprehensive care and support to vulnerable children in selected communities of Northeast Nigeria. This experience opened my eyes to the importance of studying public health as a means to better serve the poor, underprivileged, and other vulnerable populations around the globe. I believe my training as a physician, with knowledge of global health statistics and trends, has the potential to help me make a positive difference in the fight against diseases that have had devastating effects in Nigeria and the world over.

I was looking for a program that would allow me to approach health as a population-based issue, not just an individual one. I was seeking the program that would have the greatest impact on me as a future public health practitioner. After doing some research, I concluded that the Interdisciplinary Masters in Public Health (IMPH) Program at the University of California, Berkeley School of Public Health had just what I was looking for. Being one of the most prestigious institutions in the world, with a renowned public health program, I decided to apply without hesitation. I received



my acceptance and placement into the IMPH program in April of 2016, and began in July. It was indeed a dream come true for me, and a giant leap in the right direction.

My experience at The University of California, Berkeley has been an incredible whirlwind thus far. The diverse student population brings varied perspectives, and allows for thought-provoking discussions on contemporary health issues. I’ve found the professors to be very knowledgeable and passionate about sharing their expertise. It has been inspiring to be among like-minded individuals who are devoted to making a positive impact through the field of public health.

The breadth courses give students a core basis and foundation for understanding the dynamics of public health. These courses have helped me to

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Jesse Ninmol *Continuing from previous page*

gain a broader perspective on health and policy management, health and social behavior, and environmental health. They have also bolstered my view of and appreciation for Bio-statistics, and the epidemiology of diseases.

The interdisciplinary concentration is a unique program that allows individuals to choose from a wide range of courses that suit their desired objectives. This was an ideal pathway for me because it gave me the opportunity to select classes that stimulate my interest, and prepare me for what I want to do in future. Initially, I was worried about what kind of courses were available, and where and how to select them. However, the Interdisciplinary program core faculty soon allayed my anxiety. They provided me with technical guidance and gave me a blueprint on how to navigate course selection. The staff exceeded my expectations by inviting IMPH alumni to talk to us new students about their experiences in the program. It helped me to hear first hand about their ups and downs pertaining to the discipline.

Day in and day out, my interest has been continually piqued, and before I knew it, I was already more than halfway into the program. I feel like I want to stay beyond the stipulated eleven months so I can continually tap knowledge from the many engaging experts that are available to me.

Upon graduation in May, I hope to return to my home country of Nigeria. I would like to be involved in designing health programs, and working to strengthen the existing health care system. In doing so, I could help combat many of the inherent health challenges faced in that part of the world. I'm so grateful that the IMPH program is providing me with the stepping stones needed in order to potentially join the ranks of future health leaders in Africa, and globally.

If you're looking for a specialty in public health that will allow you to learn about public health while exploring multiple disciplines in line with your interest, then the interdisciplinary master's in public health concentration may be just the fit for you. It is flexible beyond measure, you'll get to meet interesting students from all backgrounds and learn from shared experiences, and connect with fascinating professors from a wide array of specialties. 🌀



Director's Corner

Dear Students, Alumni, and Friends of the Interdisciplinary Program,

After five years of having the privilege to serve as the Director of the Interdisciplinary MPH Program, I write to announce that this is my final year. It's been such a pleasure to work with Anke, Laura, Svetlana, and the rest of the team here at the School of Public Health to be a part of the important training mission of the MPH program. After the school year is out, I plan on continuing to teach Global Health at UC Berkeley at the graduate and undergraduate level. We're extremely fortunate that Anke has agreed to lead the program starting in July, which will ensure a seamless transition. Anke has co-led the program with me for the last five years and I have every confidence that she will be an outstanding director.

We look forward to seeing many of you at our annual Interdisciplinary Program BBQ, on Saturday April 22nd.

Warmest wishes,

Phuoc Le, '04, MD, MPH, DTM&H
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Keep In Touch



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