

UC Berkeley School of Public Health  
Interdisciplinary MPH Program

# alumni & student news

Fall 2013

Current Students:

## Jennie Lane

DVM, Candidate for MPH 2014



*Jennie in Peru with a llama friend*

Why did I pick Berkeley?

California suits me. This is what I'm told by both perfect strangers and friends, native Californians and non-natives, and I agree with them. I'm pretty sure that it was when I was sitting on a bench at the top of Claremont Canyon, on a picture-perfect clear spring day, with a panoramic view of the entire Bay area spread out in front of me that I decided I was going to move to Berkeley for my MPH degree. This was the day *before* the Spring Visit Day offered by the School of Public Health admissions office.

I had already *visited* during admitted student days at some select Fast Coast institutions. So rational thought would dictate that I

would wait to make my decision until I'd met my soon-to-be-inspiring advisors and my creative, intellectual classmates. The next day, I met these individuals and listened to brilliant faculty members give sample lectures and their reasons why I should pick Berkeley and not someplace else. Then I sat on the lawn in front of Moffitt Library and had a casual conversation with Phuoc, Anke, and some of my future cohort about our dreams and goals. Later that day I swam laps in the marble Hearst swimming pool before catching a plane back to Pennsylvania. While swimming those laps I decided that I would definitely come to Berkeley.

Don't get me wrong: I went home and rationally *angsted* about the decision for weeks. I talked to current students and graduates about the pros and cons of each school and what their experience was like as a student, discussed opportunities after graduation, etc. I wrote lists. I looked at the degree objectives for each school, availability of career services, leadership opportunities, job placements, etc. I did my due diligence in making an informed decision. But I already had made up my mind.

I love being a graduate student at UC Berkeley. Specific reasons for this (besides the four (!) outdoor campus swimming pools and general awesomeness of the Bay area) are many. My Interdisciplinary cohort classmates are phenomenal – they will all be lifelong colleagues and many will be forever-friends. We balance and complement each other really well, and our Friday seminar sessions are lively, intelligent discussions where we all learn from each other. The Interdisciplinary degree also offers an enormous degree of flexibility in choosing classes. I love being able to take a wide array of different courses. One of my favorites is Global Leadership offered through the Haas School of Business.

The vast number and breadth of opportunities for students at Berkeley is staggering. There is always something going on — a lecture by someone famous or better yet, soon-to-be famous for a new invention, discovery or idea. There are neat events and excellent resources at centers on campus like the Blum Center and CEGA, and competitions like [BigIdeas@Berkeley](mailto:BigIdeas@Berkeley) and the digital health hack-a-thon to collaborate with other students and departments and have fun while learning!

(continued on page 2)

You are cordinally invited to the  
University of California at Berkeley  
School of Public Health  
Interdisciplinary MPH Program

**5th Annual  
Interdisciplinary  
Alumni & Student  
POTLUCK  
PICNIC AND B.B.Q.**



**Sunday, April 13, 2014  
12:00-4:00 pm**

*Codornices Park  
1201 Euclid Avenue, Berkeley*

An opportunity for alumni,  
students, faculty and staff to meet  
and socialize

Significant others, children and pets  
all welcome

Invitation will be emailed in March 2014

For information please call 510 643-2700

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Being a public health student in the Bay Area has lots of other advantages, too. The area is a hotbed of brilliant ideas and start-up companies pushing the edge in health care and information technology as well as development ideas and solutions for a better world.

We now are about halfway through our program. As 11-month students, we had to hit the ground running with some clear ideas about we want to achieve in the short time we're here, as well as which classes we're looking for and the skills we want to develop. The time is flying by and I'm already looking down my career path and options for the future. I'm not sure which way I'm going yet...the options are many and fortunately there are excellent resources to help with this decision. One thing is certain: I know the Interdisciplinary MPH at UC Berkeley is giving me the skills to collaborate with many different disciplines in the realm of "One Health" ([www.onehealthinitiative.com/](http://www.onehealthinitiative.com/)) and development worldwide, and the tools I will need to make a difference.

The Interdisciplinary MPH  
Program now has its own  
**LinkedIn** Group. To join,  
please email Laura Spautz at  
[lspautz@berkeley.edu](mailto:lspautz@berkeley.edu)





## Introducing the Interdisciplinary MPH Class of 2013-14



*Moxie Loeffler, MD; Sonia Menchavez, OD; Sacha Rood, MSW; Mehran Mosley, MD; Alissa Bernstein, MA; Jessica Vechakul, MS*



*Jennie Lane, DVM; Kenny Pettersen, BS; Stutee Khandelwal, MD; Preeti Dave, MD; Eva Hansen, MSW*



*Maisha Davis, BA; Adam Laytin, MD; Sowyma Srinivasan, MD; Benjamin Park, MD; Marvin Miranda, Jr., BA.*

Dear Interdisciplinary Alumni and Students,

We hope that you and your families are well. Laura, once again, gathered a terrific line-up of stories from you and we hope you enjoy them.

For this school year, the biggest news to report is the arrival of our new dean, Dr. Stef Bertozzi. Dr. Bertozzi joined us from the Gates Foundation where he was the director of HIV/AIDS and TB. He has brought new energy and a call for the entire student body, staff, and faculty of our school to envision what opportunities to strive for and what challenges to tackle as a school. Dean Bertozzi has shown a strong interest in hearing everyone's ideas, which includes those of our large alumni family.



As always, please feel free to drop us a line at any time to update us on new jobs, new degrees, or new additions to your family. We love hearing from you! We look forward to seeing many of you at the annual picnic on Sunday, April 13, 2014 (see page 2 for more information).

Sincerely,

Phuoc Le '04  
Director  
[ple@berkeley.edu](mailto:ple@berkeley.edu)



**Director's Corner**

Current Students:

# Jessica Vechakul

MS, Candidate for MPH 2014



Before joining the Interdisciplinary MPH program, I spent several years working with MIT's D-lab on appropriate technologies that would improve quality of life in developing countries. During my master's program, Zambia became my second home. I worked there with welders, community health workers, and patients to design the *Zambulance* -- a bicycle ambulance that could transport patients from remote areas to the nearest health center (<http://cadlab6.mit.edu/bike.ambulance/>). These experiences taught me the importance of building capacity and co-design with communities. It was incredibly rewarding to see my Zambian partners at Disacare continuing to design and disseminate Zambulances and to hear reports of the Zambulances actually saving lives.

Realizing that I could have even greater impact as a professor by inspiring and empowering the next generation of social innovators, I decided to pursue a PhD in Mechanical Engineering. My PhD research focuses on characterizing design thinking approaches for poverty alleviation. Design thinking is common in industries such as product design and is emerging as a new approach in the social sector. Design thinking is a structured problem-solving process in which interdisciplinary teams identify a challenge, generate concepts, create prototypes, and refine concepts to create innovative solutions. In particular, I'm interested in participatory co-design as a means for enhancing a community's sense of control over their destiny. By teaching a broadly applicable problem-solving process and engaging community members in the design and implementation of transformative initiatives, design thinking can increase

people's sense of control over circumstances in their lives. One of my mentors, Len Syme, suggests that increasing control of destiny may be the key to changing the course of a person's health, education, career and quality of life.

Because my previous international development projects involved public health issues such as access to drinking water and sanitation, pursuing an MPH seemed like a logical next step. In my quest to understand and address the structural causes of poverty, I've taken courses in International Rural Development Policy, Social Epidemiology, Community-Based Participatory Research, and Designing Innovations in Public Health. At the School of Public Health, I've found leaders dedicated to collaborating with communities to improve population health and address the upstream causes producing social and health inequities.

For my MPH project, I am conducting an evaluation of a "design thinking" training in the Castlemont Best Babies Zone (BBZ). The BBZ is \$2.75 million pilot initiative aimed at improving birth outcomes for infants and addressing health inequities in four major U.S. cities – Cincinnati, Milwaukee, New Orleans, and Oakland.

I am so grateful for my project mentors, Bina Patel Shrimali of the Alameda County Public Health Department and Jaspal Sandhu of the Gobe Group. This project has been an incredible opportunity to meet the leaders of economic development innovation in the East Bay. I believe in the potential of this project to address the social determinants of health by cultivating an environment that is more conducive to making healthy choices. The project aims to leverage the assets and resources of the community, such as the vibrant art and music culture and local businesses, to stimulate economic development and enhance community cohesion.

I am so happy with my decision to join the Interdisciplinary MPH program. I love our cohort. The group is full of extremely caring and insightful people who are dedicated to being change makers for the good of society. For a glimpse of our diversity, our group includes doctors, social workers, an ophthalmologist, a veterinarian, an anthropologist, an air force surgeon, and

(continued on page 5)



Zambulance

myself—an engineer. Our Interdisciplinary Seminar discussions are full of fascinating stories, ranging from the challenges and joys of pediatric medicine in the Alaskan tundra to studying the influence of working equines on the health of families in rural Nicaragua.

Many thanks to our fearless leaders, Phuoc, Anke, and Laura, for bringing such an amazing group of people together! I am really excited about this opportunity to deepen my education, develop lifelong friendships with my classmates, and build relationships with communities and organizations in Oakland.



*Alumni Update:*

## Jorge Galdamez

**MD, MPH 2000**

It has been a long journey, and today I am site medical director for the Santa Ana/Bristol California medical clinic of Altamed Health Services Corporation. My journey started in medical school and continued through the Interdisciplinary MPH Program and ten years of working in community medicine and learning about health care. Being in a position of leadership, I can now work to impact health care at the levels of clinic, public health and community.

When I started my medical practice 10 years ago, I knew I needed to learn the art of practicing medicine. Focusing on the patient in front of me, I took care of what was in front of me — and often it was chronic conditions such as diabetes, heart disease and obesity. I focused on the disease process and slowing it down. It was frustrating because I knew I could do more.

I remembered my days at the School of Public Health and how I could work at the community and public health levels. I knew I needed to reach beyond what I was doing in the patient room. As I mastered the practice of clinical medicine I also started to understand health care and its culture, and how delivery could be made more effective through population-based measures and prevention. Now, utilizing the principles I had learned in public health, my thoughts turned to treating patients *before* they presented with debilitating diseases.

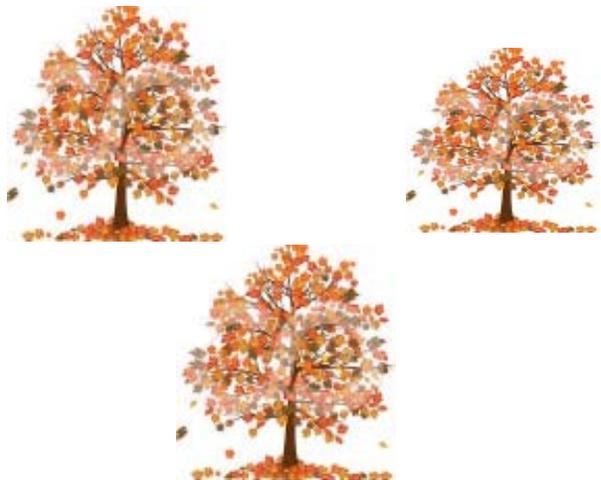
On a personal level, I needed to do something too. I had ballooned to 318 pounds and began to have problems with my own early manifestations of debilitating conditions. What could I do? I focused on health education, prevention,

safety measures, and nutrition—public health approaches that had I learned about while I was in the Interdisciplinary MPH Program.

Utilizing what was available to me through my support staff and community programs, I referred patients to resources that could help them. I also incorporated preventive measures into my practice by educating my patients personally on what they could do to change their lifestyles through proper nutrition, physical activity, and safety practices.

I soon realized that I needed to do more – I had to advocate for these programs at the administrative and community leadership level. As I referred patients to outside programs, I realized existing resources were not very well funded or supported by the medical community. I knew that through my educational background that blended medicine and public health, I could find ways to make a greater impact.

This journey has led me to a leadership role at Altamed Health Services Corporation. And through this journey, I have lost over 100 pounds and completed two Ironman triathlons, and numerous marathons and half-marathons. Without my combined educational experience of medicine and public health, I would not be where I am today: positioned to make a difference in medicine, public health, and our community.



Alumni Update:

# Taylor Priestley

MSW, MPH 2012



I have been passionate about children's oral health since working in preschool classrooms as a health specialist for a Head Start preschool. I worked with so many children in pain and with parents frustrated and demoralized after failed attempts to navigate the public dental insurance system. I came to Berkeley to study social welfare and public health and developed the skill set I needed to tackle a system that was so clearly broken.

I chose the Interdisciplinary MPH Program because I felt I would have the flexibility to pursue my interests, and prepare to put my research into practice after graduation. I was right. Nap Hosang was supportive and encouraging of my intent to continue my research examining access to care and unmet dental health needs among Head Start children. I took courses all over campus and built a truly interdisciplinary program that knit together my academic and practical interests. The Sociology of Poverty, Racial and Ethnic Differences in Health Status, Program Planning and the social epidemiology reading group were just a few of the classes where I found in-depth, cross-disciplinary discussion of the public health and social justice issues that fascinate me.

Throughout my MPH year, I focused on examining disparities in pediatric oral health for children living in poverty. With the support of Claudia Waters and Dr. Cheri Pies, I was able to conduct an analysis of Head Start administrative data that produced findings I would later present at the California Head Start Association's Health Institute in May, 2012.

After graduation, I was hired by California's health insurance exchange Covered California as an analyst on the Plan Management team. I participated in the Qualified Health Plan evaluation and selection process, and supported the QHP contracting effort. I worked on the team developing a quality rating system methodology. I spent the summer of 2013 working closely with several regional health plans to prepare for implementation and our October 1, 2013 launch.

Best of all, I've worked on every step of the process to solicit, evaluate, select, and contract with the stand-alone pediatric dental plans. I developed the evaluation approach and process and managed the drafting of our dental plan model contract. We are currently working with stakeholders and dental plan representatives to set our pediatric dental policy agenda for 2015.

Every day in my job I use my MPH education. My organization is pursuing the "triple aim": improve the health of the population; enhance the patient experience of care (including quality, access, and reliability); and reduce, or at least control, the per capita cost of care. My work towards these aims is grounded in the strong health policy education I received at Berkeley. In this government start-up environment, I use leadership and management skills that I gained in the Interdisciplinary Program to navigate situations involving a diverse mix of executives, consultants, partner plan representatives, and stakeholders.

The one activity I couldn't fit into my MPH year was planning my wedding — that had to wait until June 2013. Now Covered California has launched successfully, my husband and I are off on our honeymoon this month, traveling to Thailand and Cambodia.

I'm so grateful for the experience of Berkeley's Interdisciplinary MPH and all the opportunities that await me.



Alumni Update:

# Mark Yeung

**MSW, LCSW, MPH 2009**



Hello from Hong Kong International Airport where I am composing this newsletter update. I hope this newsletter finds you and your family well! I am excited to share my experiences since graduation with my fellow MPH'ers.

After graduation, I became a hospice social worker with Pathways Home Health and Hospice, a San Francisco Bay Area hospice agency, and an agency that I had interned with during graduate school. I enjoyed working as a hospice social worker, providing essential case management and counseling services to patients and families who are facing end-of-life issues.

I worked at Pathways for three years after graduation, providing direct services, and I always still had my MPH passion for improving population health and making systemic change. After Pathways, I decided I want to work in a larger health care system with the goal of eventually doing more health systems development and evaluation work.

This past January, I started working for the Veterans Health Administration (VA). Health systems don't get much bigger than the VA. Going from a local nonprofit hospice to such a large health care system was quite an adjustment!



I am happy to report that I am adjusting well and really enjoying my job. I currently work at VA Martinez, California as an inpatient rehabilitation social worker. I serve two populations: older veterans with age-related conditions such as neurological, neuromuscular and orthopedic conditions that require physical, occupational and speech rehabilitation. For this group, I provide case management services and discharge planning to the veteran and their family to assist with long term care planning to help the veteran sustain their rehabilitation gains.

The second population I work with is a younger veteran group with traumatic brain injury (TBI). Many of the veterans in this second group are Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans who have suffered TBI due to combat violence and as a result, need intensive inpatient neurological, cognitive, speech and often physical therapy rehabilitation. I work closely with the TBI team to coordinate services for these veterans, who after rehabilitation, may have goals of moving away, returning to school or pursuing a new vocation.

Working as a VA social worker has helped me to develop professionally. Unfortunately, too many of our veterans suffer from psychosocial problems such as homelessness, mental illness and substance abuse in addition to the health problems that the general population faces. I have spent significant time in the last year learning about the resources that the VA has to offer. It is a large system that has many resources for veterans and their families but due to the size of the system, it is also crucial to have social workers who can serve as patient navigators to assist in service access.

My last four years of work have affirmed my dual interest in clinical social work as well as health program development. I currently serve on a committee to develop a new transitional TBI program that will provide services to veterans in a community housing setting rather than in an inpatient setting. The goal is to serve veterans with TBI in a less institutional setting that will facilitate eventual reintegration into the general community. Since graduation, I have also become a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) and have started a private practice ([www.marklcsw.com](http://www.marklcsw.com)) to provide psychotherapeutic services in the Oakland/East Bay Area as well as the Mountain View/South Bay Area.

The last four and a half years have not just been work. I married a wonderful person and we are very much enjoying our life in Oakland, California. To unwind from work, I still play soccer regularly and we are blessed to have great family and friends.

Happy holidays to you all and please feel free to contact me to say hello or if we can collaborate in any way. I always look forward to hearing from fellow Interdisciplinary MPHers! We were "iMPH" before "i" anything was cool.

Working hard,

Mark Yeung  
([myeung10@gmail.com](mailto:myeung10@gmail.com))