

Tow Scholars Announced

Midcareer Awards Drive Discovery

This spring, Dean Linda P. Fried, MD, MPH, announced a new prize to support research by mid-career investigators. Four faculty were named Tow Scholars in recognition of outstanding research and thought leadership: Katherine Keyes, Jeffrey Shaman, Yuanjia Wang, and Patrick Wilson. Each will receive \$25,000 annually for three years to support research, along with mentoring and training in leadership and development.

The Tow Foundation—established by Mailman School Board of Overseers member Leonard Tow and his late wife, Claire Tow—funds the program, which reflects the foundation’s commitment to vulnerable populations and health equity. “These four faculty have demonstrated a unique capacity for original research,” says Fried. “I am grateful to The Tow Foundation for their vision and generosity in creating this program to help our scientists realize their full potential to improve population health.”

Katherine Keyes, MPH ’06, PhD ’10, an assistant professor of Epidemiology, has authored more than 130 peer-reviewed publications. She has documented precipitous declines in nightly sleep times among teenagers over the last 20 years for the journal *Pediatrics* and has debunked the notion that compared with men, women initiate alcohol use at a later age and become dependent more quickly (in the *American Journal of Psychiatry*). Her textbook on epidemiological methods was published in 2014; she has a second textbook forthcoming in 2016.

Jeffrey Shaman, PhD ’03, an associate professor of Environmental Health Sciences, develops computer models to predict the spread of infectious diseases. In June 2014, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention chose Shaman’s method as the winner of its “Predict the Influenza Season” challenge. In the first months of the Ebola epidemic, Shaman was invited to extend his work to anticipate the growth of the outbreak in West Africa. In July, *PLOS Computational Biology* published his technique for



generating reliable flu forecasts in Hong Kong, where influenza infection rates ebb and flow year-round.

Yuanjia Wang, PhD ’05, an associate professor of Biostatistics and a core member of the Division of Biostatistics at the New York State Psychiatric Institute, uses data-driven approaches to discover disease origins and increase diagnostic capabilities for conditions like Huntington’s disease and Parkinson’s disease, as well as psychiatric disorders. Wang’s research productivity—described as “astounding,” by Biostatistics Chair DuBois Bowman, PhD, in his nomination letter—places her in the top 2 percent nationally for biostatistics scholars in her cohort across all specialty areas. She is a member of the editorial board of the *Shanghai Archives of Psychiatry* and a biostatistician for Columbia’s Complicated Grief Treatment Program.

In his research, **Patrick Wilson, PhD**, an associate professor of Sociomedical Sciences and founder of the Society, Psychology, and Health Research (SPHERE) Lab, aims to address health disparities affecting diverse and marginalized populations. He investigates the psychological, socio-cultural, and institutional factors that shape HIV-related health outcomes among minority gay men, other men who have sex with men, and HIV-positive youth and adults. In 2014, *Health Psychology* published his finding that HIV-positive men whose moods improved in a given week were more likely to use a condom, while poor mood was associated with instances of unprotected sex.

In Memoriam

Mervyn Susser, 92

Mervyn Susser, MD, longtime chair of the Department of Epidemiology and founding director of Columbia University’s Sergievsky Center, died in August 2014. He was 92. Susser was widely credited

with helping the field of epidemiology establish proven methods for studying and treating disease. His work ranged from running an apartheid-era clinic for black South Africans to investigating famine in the Netherlands and AIDS in the U.S. and South Africa. With his wife, Zena Stein, MD, a professor emerita of Epidemiology,

Susser promoted some of the earliest educational and treatment programs for AIDS in South Africa. Their son, Ezra Susser, MD, MPH ’82, DrPH ’92, also a former Mailman School chair of Epidemiology, has continued the couple’s investigations into the effects of famine on prenatal development and lifelong health.

Bookshelf

2015 Faculty Publications

* ***Bridging the Gap***, by Sally Findley, PhD, professor of Population and Family Health and of Sociomedical Sciences. Based on in-depth evaluations from immigrant health programs in New York City and dozens of complementary interviews, *Bridging the Gap: How Community Health Workers Promote the Health of Immigrants* offers insights into how community health workers, often immigrants themselves, help newcomers to the United States overcome obstacles to healthcare. With co-author Sergio E. Matos, executive director of the Community Health Worker Network of NYC and president of Health Innovation Associates, Findley distills those firsthand lessons into recommendations for best practices in developing and deploying effective community health worker programs that can help immigrant communities improve their health.

* ***Boldly Queer: African Perspectives on Same-sex Sexuality and Gender Diversity***, edited by Theodoros Sandfort, PhD, associate professor of Sociomedical Sciences. This collection of papers by African activists and scholars was generated as part of the second African Same-sex Sexualities and Gender Diversity Conference, held in Nairobi, Kenya, in March 2014. The conference identified and celebrated indigenous and evolving male, female, and gender-variant same-sex sexual practices, identities, and communities, including expressions of gender diversity. The conference also promoted social acceptance and the physical and social well-being of people across the spectrum of sexual identity and practice.

* ***It's Your World: Get Informed, Get Inspired & Get Going***, by Chelsea Clinton, MPH '10, adjunct assistant professor of Health Policy and Management. Clinton writes for readers ages 10 to 14, tackling some of the world's biggest challenges and sharing the stories of young people who are already making an impact in their own communities and around the globe. Charts, graphs, and photographs augment Clinton's writing on poverty, homelessness, food insecurity, access to education, gender equality, epidemics, noncommunicable diseases, climate change, and more.



SHIFTing the Campus Climate

Study Launched

In May, the Mailman School hosted a symposium identifying gaps in understanding the prevention of sexual violence on college campuses, calling for a broad interdisciplinary agenda for the next generation of research.

The daylong event, “Transforming the Campus Climate: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Sexual Violence,” was one of the first public activities sponsored by the Sexual Health Initiative to Foster Transformation, or SHIFT, a research initiative announced in

February by Columbia University President Lee C. Bollinger, JD. “Sexual violence has deep roots within our society,” says SHIFT co-director Jennifer Hirsch, PhD, a professor of Sociomedical Sciences. “In order to address it effectively, we need to understand more about the individual, social, and institutional factors that make it more likely to occur.”

Incidents of sexual assault on college campuses—approximately 90 percent of which are not reported—are thought to be pervasive across most kinds of educational institutions. The most recent national study indicates that as many as 1 in 5 women, and 1 in 16 men, experiences some form of sexual violence while in college.

The conference included national leaders in sociology, medicine, and psychology, who explored the factors that underlie student vulnerability to sexual violence. Says Hirsch: “Our capacity to respond effectively to the challenge of building campus climates where everyone is safe must not be held back by a lack of empirical knowledge.”

Jennifer Hirsch, PhD (right), and Claude Ann Mellins, PhD, co-direct the SHIFT study.





A Capital Career Spring Break Field Trip

Compared with the beach, cherry blossoms could be a tough sell. But for more than 70 Mailman School students intent on careers in the nation's capital, Washington, D.C., was the perfect spring break destination. In March, the Office of Career Services—in collaboration with the Offices of Alumni Relations and Student Affairs—hosted a four-day field trip for master's and doctoral students to meet with alumni and employers to learn more about career options in the District of Columbia.

"Washington, D.C., is where important national health-policy decisions are shaped in and around federal agencies," says Heather Krasna, assistant dean of Career Services, who spearheaded the second annual outing. "It's also the No. 1 starting point in the United States for an international career."

More than 20 D.C.-based employers—including the U.S. Departments of State and of Health and Human Services—welcomed the students, who also visited the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), Pact International, Chemonics, the Kaiser Family Foundation, and Families USA.

At each organization, public health professionals took a few

minutes to discuss pressing issues with the students. In 2014, for example, students heard about tobacco policy in Latin America from an expert at the Pan American Health Organization and about the impact of the Affordable Care Act on the federal budget from an economist at the Congressional Budget Office. Participating alumni in 2015 included Ariel Pablos-Méndez, MPH '92, assistant administrator for global health at USAID, and David Michaels, MPH '81, PhD '87, who heads the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

Other activities included one-on-one informational interviews and a cocktail party with area alumni. To help students maximize the opportunities, Krasna led a workshop with tips on networking, advice for setting up informational interviews, and proper etiquette for thank-you letters. In advance of the trip, students were also able to order Mailman School-branded business cards and meet with the Career Services staff to discuss job search strategies and review their resumes. "A Mailman School degree is the ticket to a huge variety of exciting and rewarding career choices," says Krasna. "We want to give students every opportunity to explore the options and make the connections so they can follow their dreams."

Commencement Kudos

Class of '15

In June, 21 doctoral students and more than 600 master's students celebrated the completion of their degrees.

Babatunde Osotimehin—executive director of UNFPA, the United Nations' Population Fund, and the recipient of the Dean's Distinguished Service Award—gave the Commencement address, reflecting on this year's adoption by the global community of sustainable development goals to improve international health and well-being. "We have made progress," he said, "but it's not enough." He urged the graduates to protect the vulnerable, whether earthquake victims in Nepal or poor Americans. "You can be agents of change."

Toluwa Olokunde, who like Osotimehin is a Nigerian national, delivered remarks on behalf of the graduating class. "Though we are a diverse group, we are united by one thing: our unique dreams," she said. "They are dreams to succeed in our commitment to protect and improve the health of populations in our home countries and all over the world."



Well Rounded

Students Honored

When Nina Morency-Brassard, MPH '15, traveled to Jordan in June 2013 for her summer practicum with Women Under Siege, she expected to resume her coursework within a few months. Instead, she was gone more than a year. "The refugee situation was worsening by the day, and it seemed against the ethos of humanitarian work to leave when my skills could be of use," says the 29-year-old, who worked as a public health consultant for International Medical Corps relief programs in Syria. "I felt compelled to stick around."

To honor that spirit—exemplified, as well, by her work with the Mailman School's Reproductive Health Access, Information and Services in Emergencies (RAISE) Initiative—Morency-Brassard was this year's recipient of the John and Kathleen Gorman Public Health Humanitarian Award. In July, she began work with the International Rescue Committee's emergency response and preparedness team.

Global Health grad Anna Larsen, MPH '15, was this year's recipient of the Bernard Challenor Spirit Prize, in recognition of her expansive connections with departments throughout the Mailman School. Now a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention fellow in Pretoria, South Africa, Larsen worked with ICAP on the Global Nurse Capacity Building project during her first year at the Mailman School. For her practicum, she traveled to Tanzania with the Connect Project, led by faculty from Population and Family Health. Back in New York, she extended her work on the project. "I wanted to see how different research groups do things," says Larsen, who also worked as a teaching assistant for the course Systems Thinking Approach to Maternal Health. In pursuit of a network of peers, Larsen strove to build camaraderie among her Global Health cohort. "You're in different countries throughout your career," she says, "and having a core of peers was really important to me."

Honor Society

Sea captain and industrialist Joseph DeLamar was a champion of public health, providing in his estate for the 1922 creation of the Joseph DeLamar Institute of Public Health, the precursor to today's Mailman School of

Public Health. Today, the School's DeLamar Society honors the dedicated donors who make annual student scholarship gifts of \$500 or more. Society benefits include invitations to seminars featuring leaders in the field and opportunities to meet scholarship recipients. Membership increased by 30 percent in 2014.

Howard Nadel, a member of the Mailman School Alumni Association board, has been a

DeLamar Society member since 2009. "We give every year," says Nadel, who is longtime director of research for the North Bronx Healthcare Network and administrative director of the Human Genetics Lab at Jacobi Medical Center. "You give and see the impact right away—through these students I'm creating a great wealth for society, because they're all going out into the world and giving back."

Mirror Image

In June, the Alumni Association selected Paul W. Brandt-Rauf, MD, DrPH '87, as the 2015 recipient of the Allan Rosenfield Alumni Award for Excellence. Established in 2009 to honor the memory of Rosenfield, who served as dean from 1986 to 2008, the award recognizes the achievements of the School's outstanding alumni and their leadership in the field of public health. Brandt-Rauf is dean of the School of Public Health at the University of Illinois at Chicago, and a professor emeritus and former chair of the Department of Environmental Health Sciences at the Mailman School. His major research interests are in occupational and environmental carcinogenesis. He has authored more than 230 journal articles and book chapters and has edited several volumes on occupational and environmental health. He is editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*. He has served as an adviser and consultant to the World Health Organization, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, the U.S. Department of Energy, and the Environmental Protection Agency, among others.

In his acceptance speech, Brandt-Rauf remembered the award's namesake. "Allan always told his students, 'If you can look in the mirror and honestly say you used your degree to make this world a better place, then you've earned your diploma.'" There's no doubt, said Brandt-Rauf, that Rosenfield left the world a better place. "It's an inspiration to me to continue to strive for excellence in public health and all the values that embody Allan's legacy as long as I'm able. Even in the end when the world could no longer heal Allan," he said, "Allan continued to heal the world."

Excellence on Board

"My Mailman experience engrained me with two things: first, the lesson that I'm not the smartest person in the room," says Carlos Cuevas, MPH '12, "but more important, the ability to embrace the ideas of people with new approaches and perspectives so that, together, we can tackle complex issues." As a senior adviser to New York's Medicaid director, Cuevas helps oversee the Empire State's redesign of the program, which serves nearly 6 million people. When Governor Andrew Cuomo pledged to send a "Healthcare SWAT Team" to Puerto Rico to help the people redesign their Medicaid program, he tapped Cuevas.

Connecting with the smartest people in the room requires being in the room—so soon after graduation, Cuevas joined the board of the Mailman School Alumni Association. "If you want to take on complex public health issues, you can't look at just one facet of the field," he says. "I'm always looking to hear and read about new ideas, strategies, and approaches. I constantly think about how we develop flexible, agile policy that allows tailored implementation across various settings." Through the Alumni Association's educational activities, student and peer mentoring, social events, and career networks, Cuevas has access to a vibrant community of public health leaders working around the world. "Remaining engaged in the Mailman community has given me access to thought-leaders across the public health spectrum," he says. "It's like having access to my own public health think-tank!"

With the 30 other members of the alumni board—who span graduation years from the 1950s through the current decade—he works year-round to foster alumni connections. Says Cuevas: "It's the people comprising the Mailman School community that make us unique."



The Alumni Summit for Public Health Leadership on June 4 featured the discussion "Managing the Ebola Crisis and Pandemic Preparedness" between Professor of Epidemiology Wafaa El-Sadr, MD, MPH '91, founding director of ICAP, and Craig Spencer, MD, MPH '13, a Doctors Without Borders volunteer who treated people with Ebola in Guinea and after returning home became the first person diagnosed with the disease in New York City. "We know what can happen," said Spencer, "because it's happened before."

A Lofty Vision

by Maria Costanzo

Jason Friesen, MPH '12, was on a flight over the Caribbean when the pilot called passengers' attention to a view that would transform the young translator's career trajectory. It was August 2005, and the terrible power of Hurricane Katrina was unmistakable even from the air. Back on the ground in Miami, Friesen witnessed the devastation firsthand.

When he returned home, Friesen signed up for emergency medical technician training. Paramedic's license in hand, he volunteered with the Red Cross in Mexico. When an earthquake struck Haiti in 2010, he served as a program manager with the international relief organization Project Hope. The work highlighted a stark need for better emergency response systems in less developed regions of the world. Still employed full-time for Project Hope, Friesen enrolled in the Mailman School, commuting monthly from Port-au-Prince to Washington Heights for classes.

After completing his degree, Friesen left Haiti to focus on Trek Medics International, a nonprofit he'd started years earlier to solve the problems he'd witnessed in Mexico and Haiti. "I walked out of that MPH program with a business plan, a marketing plan, and tools for recruiting," he says. He also gained a medical director: Kevin Munjal, MD, MPH '12. Says Friesen: "Trek Medics International went from a weekend hobby to a full-time job."

In the U.S., the linchpins of emergency response are an elaborate 911 system, specially trained professionals, and ambulance transport. In the developing world, emergency response relies on an informal network of Good Samaritans who get people

to the hospital any way they can—in taxis, pickup trucks, or buses. To foreign donors and government officials, the dearth of ambulances can be concerning. But as an EMT, Friesen had discovered that ambulances aren't enough. Dedicated emergency vehicles cost a lot to maintain and rely on a network of paved roads—rarities in isolated, impoverished communities. "An ambulance," says the 35-year-old, "does not a system make."

Instead, Trek Medics bolsters existing systems and resources in each community it serves. Volunteers from the U.S., supported by Trek Medics, train local emergency responders in the classroom and in the field. Working with fire departments or hospitals, the nonprofit assesses local emergency transport resources, taking into account the road and traffic conditions in the area. In effect, Friesen has created a new model of emergency response tailored to the conditions in developing countries.

Trek Medics also provides low-tech emergency dispatch software known as Beacon, dubbed "Uber for disaster zones" by *Time* magazine. Based on widely available cellphone text-messaging technology, Beacon uses numbers, rather than words, to speed communication about patient status and responder needs within a network of participating drivers.

Trek Medics now coordinates programs in the Dominican Republic, Mexico, and Tanzania, with growth on the horizon. Google awarded the nonprofit a grant for Beacon, and USAID has given additional funds for expansion in the Dominican Republic.

Now based in Manhattan, Friesen devotes the bulk of his time to administrative duties these days. He still gets a thrill from seeing people embrace the organization's mission. "The most rewarding part," he says, "is when volunteers who have really gone out on a limb to work with us come back to me and say, 'I get it. I get it and it works.'"



Pipeline to Practice



Philanthropist Eugene Lang is no stranger to bold promises. In 1981, he told sixth-graders in East Harlem that he would provide college tuition upon their high school graduation. Since then, Lang's I Have a Dream Foundation has benefited more than 16,000 young people. In 2003, Lang sought to create a pipeline of underrepresented minority youth into health sciences and the Lang Youth Medical Program was born at Columbia University Medical Center.

As part of the program's "mini-medical school," students from Upper Manhattan explore the professional opportunities in healthcare. Each year, more than 200 sixth-graders apply for 1 of 14 slots. The chosen few spend six years of Saturdays—and full weeks each summer—rotating through classrooms, hospitals, and clinics at CUMC. Beyond scientific training, they also receive college counseling and mentoring—often from program alumni who return to the community after graduating from college.

In 2013, Jacob Barela, MPH '15, and Chelsea Kolff, MPH '15, developed a public health curriculum for Lang scholars in the 10th

and 11th grades. Mailman School students and faculty volunteers pitch in, too, covering prevention science, ethics, and global issues.

"Few people can decide at age 12 that they want to be doctors," says Marina Catallozzi, MD, MSc (*pictured upper right*), an assistant professor of Population and Family Health and of Pediatrics at Columbia P&S, who for eight years was the program's medical director. "Lang scholars see everything—from social work to dentistry to surgery, and of course, public health," she says. "They enter college with strong personal interests in improving community health."