

PUBLIC HEALTH HAPPENINGS

DECEMBER 2021



PREPARING LEADERS FOR A HEALTHIER TOMORROW

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NOTE FROM DIRECTOR

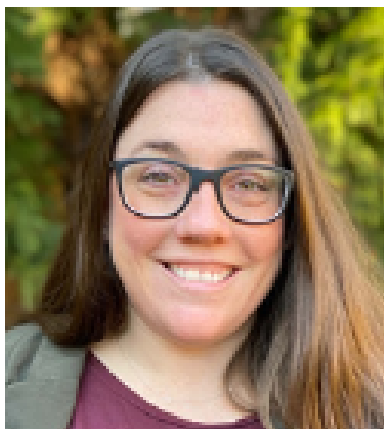
David I. Gregorio, PhD, M.S.

The past 20 months have not only threatened our health but challenged our abilities to be together and share with one another. As we moved in March 2020 from in-person to on-line encounters, many opportunity to interact and obtain feedback were lost (or at least significantly interrupted). I hope you share the excitement for getting back together, although I know that joy will be tempered as we once again experience the discomforts of looking for parking spaces and walking to and from class in the cold and dark. I hope such problems are few and limited, and we once again recognize the power of our collective voice.

We are delighted to resume our newsletter, Public Health Happenings, which will provide opportunities to showcase the many accomplishments of our students, alumni, faculty, community partners and staff. Public Health Happenings also will provide information about requirements, upcoming deadlines and deliverables necessary for your degree, as well as occasionally alert you to employment and service opportunities around the region. Know of something about public health that others should be aware of? Send a message to Hillary Barigye (at barigye@uchc.edu).

These next few weeks are an important time in our social and academic calendars - when we find time to relax and reflect on our Fall semester while also joining in on the hustle of the holidays. Our program staff and faculty wish you the best over these days. Use them wisely and safely as the chance to be together with one another can no longer be considered as guaranteed!

NEW FACULTY



Kristin A. Guertin, PhD, MPH
Assistant Professor

Dr. Guertin recently joined our faculty. Dr. Guertin designs, implements, and analyzes studies that address a range of pressing public health needs. Her training in epidemiology spans nutrition and chronic diseases with a focus on cancer. She can be reached at kguertin@uchc.edu.



Misti Levy Zamora, PhD
Assistant Professor

Dr. Zamora recently completed her postdoctoral fellowship at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. Her work focuses on identifying effective and feasible techniques that individuals can implement to reduce their exposure to ambient and indoor pollutants to mitigate negative health effects. She can be contacted at mzamora@uchc.edu.

FACULTY RESEARCH

THE MONTHLY CYCLING OF FOOD INSECURITY AND DIABETES RISK

Angela Bermúdez-Millán, PhD, MPH, is Assistant Professor in the department. Dr. Bermúdez-Millán's research examines the impact of food insecurity as it unfolds over the course of the month. Studies show that compared with non-Latino White women, Latino women are at higher risk of developing type 2 diabetes mellitus. A novel putative risk factor for the development of diabetes that disproportionately affects Latinas is food insecurity, and more specifically, the monthly cycling of food insecurity. Dr. Bermúdez-Millán is the Principal Investigator of the, "Monthly Cycling of Food Insecurity and Diabetes Risk (Food Insecurity Cycling-FIC)" study, a longitudinal study examining impact of food insecurity as it unfolds over the course of the month, to demonstrate changes in household food insecurity, dietary quality, emotional eating, binge-eating, mental distress and diabetes markers.

One of her most recent publications is: **Bermúdez-Millán A**, Feinn R, Hahn C, Jui SA, Berthold SM, Buckley T, Buxton O, Kong S, Kuoch T, Scully M, Wagner J., SNAP participation moderates the association between household food insecurity and HbA1c among Cambodian Americans with depression. *Ethn Health*. 2021 Jun 13:1-14. doi: 10.1080/13557858.2021.1939272. Epub ahead of print. PMID: 34121523.

PREVIOUS EVENTS

Research Connections

Research Connections is a networking program where undergraduate students are encouraged to ask questions and learn about ways that they can engage with faculty and their research. On the right, Dr. Bermúdez-Millán, a Co-Investigator in the Diabetes Risk Reduction through Eat, Walk, Sleep and Medication Management (DREAM) trial describes her research to UConn undergraduates.



World Food Day - Keney Park



On the left, UConn MPH students participate in the World Food Day on October 16, 2021 at Keney Park. Together with the Urban Ecology and Wellness Center, students participated in a community outreach effort assisting with COVID-19 vaccinations, health screenings, fresh produce giveaways, nutrition information, and book giveaways.

PREVIOUS EVENTS- CONT'D



APHA 2021

ANNUAL MEETING & EXPO
DENVER AND ONLINE | OCT. 24 – 27

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CREATING THE HEALTHIEST NATION:
STRENGTHENING SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

Faculty Participation in American Public Health Association (APHA) 2021 Conference

AMY HUNTER, MPH, PHD

- Child maltreatment-related children's emergency department visits before and during the COVID-19 pandemic in Connecticut
- Assessing the relationship between geographic location of residence and self-harm in adolescents

STACEY BROWN, PHD

- Health and Well-being among Well-Resourced Black Women in the Context of COVID-19
- Medical Mistrust and the Impact of COVID-19 on understudied populations

SHAYNA CUNNINGHAM, PHD

- Discrimination and perinatal depressive symptoms: The protective role of psychological resilience and social support

TARA M. LUTZ, PHD, MPH, MCHES

- Using small group, case-based learning to teach advocacy for children with disabilities among medical students
- Integrating disability content into public health and health care education programs: Another opportunity to address issues of equity and power

EXCITING PARTNERSHIP

CT DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH SCIENCES

The CT Department of Public Health will provide funds to the program to initiate a number of educational options designed to increase public interest in public health careers. Over the next 18 months, our program will (a) develop 5 on-line videos depicting various roles within the public health workforce for distribution to various educational and community groups around the state, (b) offer a 1-week residential experience on the UConn Storrs campus focused on Public Health career options for high school students and (c) support high schools around the state in offering 2 undergraduate courses (i.e., Introduction to Public Health and Principles of Epidemiology) to be taken for advanced standing credit at UConn.

GET INVOLVED:PHSO



Public Health Student Organization

We are looking for a small planning group to help revitalize our student organization that historically provided important feedback about our program as well as a source of social activities and community service. Brianna Mastorianni has stepped up to participate, and we encourage every student to consider joining the effort by sending your name to Stacey Brown (at: stbrown@uchc.edu). The following are the positions available:

UConn Public Health Student Organization: Open Positions

President

1. Attend all PHSO meetings
2. Act as a liaison between MPH student and the MPH office
3. Operate the email account (issue all relevant notices in a timely and appropriate manner)
4. Create an agenda for each meeting to be shared with board and student members
5. Supervise all business of the organization and act as liaison to MPH Advisory Committee

Vice President

1. Serve in the absence of the president
Attend all PHSO Meetings
2. Perform such duties as are required by the president
3. Act as a liaison to the MPH Curriculum Committee
4. Create the annual event calendar and supervise all external activities
5. Recruit students to serve as either officers or consultants

Treasurer

1. Maintain a book of accounts on all funds received and disbursed during the term
2. Pay bills and collect money owed to the organization
3. File copies of all receipts and monies received
4. Act as a liaison to the MPH Alumni Committee

Secretary

1. Attend all PHSO Board and Organizational Meetings
2. Keep clear and organized notes/ minutes for each meeting
3. Assist with setting up and managing PHSO led events throughout the school year
4. Assist with managing the PHSO Facebook account
5. Be willing to make announcements on behalf of PHSO in classes to inform fellow classmates of events and fundraisers

Event Coordinator

1. Attend all PHSO Board and Organizational Meetings
2. Assist with setting up and managing PHSO led events throughout the school year
3. Coordinate space and time for events to occur with UConn Health and MPH Administration
4. Research fundraising and service opportunities for group to participate in
5. Be willing to make announcements on behalf of PHSO in classes to inform fellow classmates of events and fundraisers

GSO Liaison

1. Serve as a liaison with the Graduate Student Organization and other health center graduate student groups
2. Coordinate collaborations of events and volunteer opportunities with student organizations
3. Inform PHSO members of campus wide activities for possible collaborations, including Graduate Research Day

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Julia McGowan



As part of the department's student engagement efforts, the Program in Applied Public Health Sciences designed a tagline competition. Students were encouraged to send in responses that convey what the program does in a succinct and appealing way. Students submitted their responses, and Julia McGowan, a fast track student in her final year won the competition. Moving forward the tagline for the Program in Applied Public Health Sciences is "Preparing Leaders for a Healthier Tomorrow." On the left, Professor Stacey Brown poses for a photo after handing Julia McGowan a \$200 Amazon gift card.

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT



Alexander Senetcky, MPH

Epidemiologist at the CT Department of Public Health

- **What kind of work do you do?**

I am an Epidemiologist at the CT Department of Public Health (CT DPH). I previously worked on Syndromic Surveillance and how it relates to the Opioid Epidemic. Currently, I am an architect for the daily and weekly COVID-19 reports and also oversee much of the development related to Covid-19 reporting. While at UConn, I was the treasurer of the PHSO. I now work very closely with Derek Evans who was president of the PHSO board during my tenure and who was also a very early member of what eventually become the newly minted COVID unit at the CT DPH.

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT- CONT'D

- **When did you finish your MPH at UCONN?**

I graduated in May 2018.

- **Why did you choose UCONN for your MPH?**

I went to UConn for my BS, so it was always on the radar. However, when I met the faculty and staff during one of those early program overview meet-and-greets, I had a very positive experience and just fell in love with the program, and that sealed the deal. It was an easy decision, and I still get to work with peers and faculty from that program to this very day.

- **How has acquiring your MPH influenced your career?**

It has influenced my career substantially. My mentor and advisor from the program, Amanda Durante, left to work for CT DPH, and she introduced me to some folks over there who were hiring. Eventually, I landed a contractor job with the department, which led me to my position as an epidemiologist where I get to incorporate all the wonderful things I learned into my work. The program also introduced me to lots of different folks from the public health community, like epis and local health departments. I was able to establish rapport with these folks, which has been immensely helpful now that I work with them on a professional level.

- **What are you passionate about in public health?**

I find that many of my skills fit squarely into the data science world. I really enjoy operating inside that world because it enables me to help make the lives of others better and easier! There is so much to do, and any little efficiency pays off over the long haul. When the pandemic started, the 7 days a week report for the governor was a manual slog, but now we have automated huge swathes of it. Because of that, other epidemiologists have the breathing room to do what they do best and have the information they need in a timely fashion so that they can make the best public health decisions possible.

- **What advice would you share with an incoming MPH student?**

Learn to work with data! Take any course or learning experience that exposes you to a tool or programming language that you possibly can. SAS, R, Python, and similar programs will be helpful. Being able to work with such programs is an increasingly important skills in the world we find ourselves in today. Git and/or any other source control will be your best friend. Learning to work with all of these programs will help you to be a more reliable and transparent practitioner of data. I wish folks had told me these things years ago! Even if you do not intend to work the backend of a database, you will likely use data in some decision-making processes, or you will participate in an effort to collect data from the public or stakeholders. Being able to confidently speak the language, ask the right questions, and bridge the worlds of data, public health, epidemiology, and IT might be the most important skill I have learned. Public health is this amazing, sometimes nebulous thing that crosses so many boundaries and sectors in so many ways, and data lies at the heart of much of it.

IMPORTANT DATES

The Public Health Advisory Committee reminds students of the following dates:

- 12/3 – **Last day** for Plan A masters students to submit theses to Submittable and related online forms to Degree Audit in the Office of the Registrar for Fall 2021 graduation
- 12/13 – Final Exams begin
- 12/19 – Conferral date for Fall 2021 degrees
- 12/22 – Semester grades due at 4:00 p.m.
- 12/31 – **Last day** for Plan B masters students to submit final exam online form to Degree Audit in the Office of the Registrar for Fall 2021 graduation

OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS

This Spring, we will offer a PUBH-Seminar, "Enhancing the Public Health Pipeline," in which students and faculty mentors will devise and deliver 2-3 videos for distribution over the summer. A second seminar during Spring 2022 will complete that phase of the project. We encourage students interested in communications, particularly those with any background/experience in video production to sign up for this 3-credit elective. To support the overall effort of this funding, we are looking to fill 2 half-time (10 hours per week) and 1 full-time (20 hours per week) graduate assistantships that will cover tuition and fees along with a stipend (\$8,000 and \$16,000 respectively) for the period of January - August 2022. Continued support throughout the 2022-23 academic year is possible.

PART-TIME STUDENT WORKER

Dr. Bermúdez-Millán is recruiting a part-time Bilingual/Bicultural interviewer. This individual will recruit and conduct short as well as long interviews in order to collect information from the Hartford WIC program participants on various aspects of nutrition (with strong emphasis on childhood nutrition) and other socio behavioral aspects. This position is up to 8 hours per week, variable with possible evening and weekend hours and pays \$13.00/hour. Further details can be found here: [Part-Time Student Worker](#)

The Yale New Haven Hospital Center for Outcomes Research and Evaluation (CORE) is seeking two Research Associates who will provide research support to a variety of regulatory science and data sharing research projects. A complete job description can be found here:

- Research Associate 2 - CERSI
- Research Associate 2 - YODA

CONTACT INFORMATION

Program in Applied Public Health Sciences email: publichealth@uchc.edu

Program Director: David Gregorio, PhD - 860-679-5480 (gregorio@uchc.edu)

Program Support: Danica Brown - 860-679-1510 (danbrown@uchc.edu)

Master of Public Health: <https://mph.uconn.edu/>

Department of Public Health Sciences: <https://health.uconn.edu/public-health-sciences/>