Welcome to the inaugural issue of the PopFam Quarterly, a newsletter designed to keep our students, faculty, and alumni abreast of the latest developments in the Department. The newsletter’s feature article provides an in-depth interview with Professor Linda Cushman, a PopFam faculty member who played an essential role in the development of the Mailman School of Public Health’s new curriculum. Dr. Cushman explains what the revamped curriculum means for our students and department and for expanding access to critical PopFam content within the broader Mailman School. And there’s much more: A Practicum Spotlight details the experiences of four PopFam students who recently worked in very different capacities in the Dominican Republic; a ‘Where Are They Now?’ column provides a first-hand account by a PopFam graduate who writes about how she applies the knowledge and skills she gained at Mailman in her work at Ibis Reproductive Health; and other items such as faculty who have made news, new hires, and a calendar of upcoming PopFam events.

We hope you find this newsletter informative and helpful and we welcome your feedback.

Sincerely,
John S. Santelli, MD MPH
Harriet and Robert H. Heilbrunn Professor
Chair, Heilbrunn Department of Population and Family Health

P.S.- Alumni, we’d love to hear from you! Let us know what you’re doing and we will share in upcoming editions of the PopFam newsletter.

The New Curriculum

An Interview with Dr. Linda Cushman

Dr. Linda Cushman, Clinical Professor of Population and Family Health, has been a faculty member in the Heilbrunn Department for twenty-five years. Three years ago she was asked to represent the department in the School-wide effort to plan and implement Mailman’s Curriculum Reform, rolled out in Fall 2012. Currently she is the Faculty Lead for the Integrated Practicum Experience (IPE).

We met with Dr. Cushman to find out more about the new curriculum, how it is further incorporating Population and Family Health into the MPH degree, and how PopFam students and faculty are benefitting.

In order to get a broad overview of the changes to the Mailman curriculum we asked what the main changes to the MPH curriculum have been. Dr. Cushman described the four primary shifts as 1) the merging of foundation courses to create a new, more integrated “Core” semester, 2) the creation of two new courses, Integration of Science and Practice (ISP), in which students apply critical thinking skills to current public health case studies; and Leadership and Innovation (LI), in which students
Dr. Cushman also expressed a great deal of excitement about the new approach to the MPH Practicum experience at Mailman. Ongoing Population and Family Health department placements, such as those in the Dominican Republic and several African countries, will now accept students from across the Mailman School, thus giving PopFam students the opportunity to work with colleagues from other disciplines. In addition, Dr. Cushman is part of a team working to increase the number of “School-wide” practice sites, including those that will offer an innovative, “client-based” format. At these sites, an interdisciplinary team of students will work as a team on a larger project of benefit to public health organizations.

“...The new curriculum is significantly more inclusive of Population and Family Health content, which Dr. Cushman believes is to the benefit of all Mailman students in the Core.”

While the benefits of the new curriculum are numerous, Dr. Cushman acknowledges some challenges that new students must contend with compared to those in previous cohorts, including reduced autonomy in course selection and less “out of classroom time”, particularly during the fall semester. She also stressed the importance, and challenges, of maintaining the unique culture and camaraderie that the Population and Family Health department is known for—but feels confident that it will be achieved under the strong leadership of both Alastair Ager, Director of the Academic Program, and Robin Mangini, Assistant Director of the Academic Program.

For more information on the curriculum please visit: http://www.mailman.columbia.edu/academic-departments/population-family-health/academic-programs
A Peek at the Practica

The Population and Family Health Department supports students in a wide array of Practica opportunities both in the United States and around the world. Check out the graphic to the right to see where students worked in the summer of 2012.

Practicum Spotlight: The Dominican Republic

Beginning with one student in 1999, the Dominican Republic practica program in Santo Domingo is the longest running in the Heilbrunn Department of Population and Family Health and close to being the longest running practica relationship in the Mailman School. Programs in Santiago and La Romana have been added in the last 5 years, and each city site has its own network of university and community partnerships.

To find out more about their Practicum experience we spoke to four PopFam students who had placements in the Dominican Republic during the summer of 2012: Gabrielle Abousleman, Noreen Giga, Eva Rodriguez, and Alyssa Tartaglione.

Each MPH candidate had a different Practicum placement and a unique opportunity to practice the skills they had gained in the first year of the Mailman MPH program. Alyssa worked with the Social-Cultural Movement for Haitian Workers (MOSCTHA) as a research and health program intern on a retrospective medical record review to estimate the prevalence of HPV and cervical cancer in the neighborhoods visited by the organization’s mobile health units. Noreen designed and piloted a qualitative research tool to explore the issue of femicide for La Colectiva Mujer y Salud, a women’s advocacy organization. Eva worked with ProFamilia, an organization serving women and adolescents in marginalized areas of the Dominican Republic, creating a quantitative survey on attitudes toward sexual and reproductive health for a
**Practicum Spotlight (cont.)**

mobile clinic assessment. Gabrielle also worked more closely with medical students from CUMC on a community needs assessment of the neighborhoods within walking distance of Clínica Familia de Romana to better understand the health needs of the community. They all had a chance to check in at weekly seminars at Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo and were given several opportunities to interact with and learn from public health professionals in the DR during field trips to the Ministry of Health and local public maternity clinics.

The Dominican Republic group emphasized the connection between coursework and their practica, saying that much of their work really expanded on skills learned in Research and Survey design. They also felt that the multi-disciplinary nature of the DR practica really gave students from other departments the chance to build meaningful connections with the Population and Family Health department.

While each of the placements required a lot of hard work, the group was quick to note that their time in the DR was also a lot of fun, recommending some beautiful beach spots and a popular mango festival. All four students agreed that it was the perfect chance to brush up on Spanish skills in both their social and professional lives. Overall, the group considered the DR practica opportunity a good stepping stone into international work and highly recommend this department sponsored placement as a first step for an MPH student who has not worked outside of the US.

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**PopFam in the News**

**Humanitarian Work May Raise Risk of Anxiety, Depression**
October 5, 2012
Aid work for non-governmental organizations may lead to higher rates of anxiety and depression, according to a new study. Co-author Dr. Alastair Ager shares how the triggers and risk factors may not be what is commonly expected.

**Fight Erupts Over October 3 'Plan B' Access In New York Schools**
October 1, 2012
Some New York City schools are offering the “Plan B” pill to students as an alternative form of contraception. Dr. Wendy Chavkin speaks on the research and safety of this method. (Audio)

**Common Insecticide May Harm Boys’ Brains More Than Girls’**
August 21, 2012
Dr. Virginia Rauh discusses a new study which finds that perinatal exposure to the pesticide chlorpyrifos may lead to lower IQs in boys. This is the first study to show gender differences in how the pesticide impacts the fetus.
Welcome
Lindsay Stark, DrPH, relocated to New York after two years in Indonesia and joined the faculty as assistant professor of clinical population and family health in August 2010. She has more than a decade of experience leading applied research on protection of women and children in humanitarian settings. Dr. Stark also serves as director of research and curriculum at the newly founded Center on Child Protection, based at the University of Indonesia. She is a graduate of the Mailman School.

Publications

If you would like to submit a 'Brief Mentions' to be featured in the next PopFam Quarterly please email rfm2117@columbia.edu

Where Are They Now?
Alumni Update from:
Sarah Baum, Ibis Reproductive Health

Once every 2 months, I wake up before the sun rises for a staff meeting. Our Oakland office is up the earliest so we can catch the end of the work day in South Africa. Staff meetings at the organization where I work, Ibis Reproductive Health, are slightly different than staff meetings I attended before graduating from Mailman. We coordinate staff in three time zones on two continents. Sometimes we have to say aloud that we are nodding our heads because it is hard to get feedback over the phone. Updates on the calls involve misoprostol use in Kenya, 2nd trimester abortion in Colombia and doctors that provide the abortion pill via teleconference in rural Ohio. As one of five project managers, I oversee the research we do in Latin America and the US. Women all over the world face incredible barriers to accessing safe legal abortion care. And we’ve seen increasing barriers for women — especially low-income women — in the US. In the past few years, the US has seen the largest amount of restrictive state laws since Roe v. Wade passed in 1973. Organizations such as Ibis work with progressive funders to investigate the burden of these laws on women and their families.

For example, in Texas, we partner with the Texas Policy Evaluation Project at UT Austin to gather quantitative and qualitative data from providers, women seeking abortion and local abortion funds to understand how restrictive laws passed in 2011 have affected them. For this work, I have the opportunity to develop survey instruments, pilot them with the target population, monitor the data as it’s collected and conduct analysis. I consistently rely on research design skills that I gained while at Mailman from professors including Dr. Cushman and Dr. Catallozzi. And I’m glad I kept those quantitative answer keys! I refer back to both grounded theory and quantitative methods when running analyses and building tables from the data for publication.

One of the most important parts of my experience at Mailman that I bring with me to my position at Ibis is the conversation with fellow classmates and professors about reproductive justice and health disparities. The researchers I work with at Ibis share the same commitment to research that I believe permeates the PopFam department: conduct ethical and participatory research that aims to change policy, give voice to vulnerable populations, continuously look at the issue through social, political, economic, and cultural lenses, and improve access to comprehensive (and hopefully integrated) reproductive health for women, children and families.
Introducing: The Lynne Loomis Price Scholarship Fund

Lynne Loomis-Price strongly believed in putting words into action. She was involved personally in humanitarian work throughout her life as well as facilitating much of the work Population and Family Health students completed in the department. This scholarship will be given to a second year Population and Family Health student who exemplifies Lynne's spirit and commitment to humanitarian work, her dedication to the reduction of health disparities, and her actions in pursuit of social justice both domestically and internationally.

Scholarship criteria include:

- Work Experience
- Academic Achievement (including Practicum)
- List of Need/Merit from Financial Aid

Faculty will nominate candidates for consideration and a three-person committee will review all candidates nominated based on the above criteria. For more information please contact Robin Mangini at rfm2117@columbia.edu

Upcoming Department Events

**Tuesday, April 23**
11:30am-1:00pm
"Achieving the Millennium Development Goal: The Impact of Population and Family Planning"
Dr. Herbert Peterson, Gillings School of Global Public Health, University of North Carolina
B2, 60 Haven Ave. Lunch will be served.

**Thursday, May 2**
12:00-1:30 pm
Toast to Graduating PopFam Students
Hess Commons

**Tuesday, May 21**
4:00 pm
Mailman School of Public Health Commencement Ceremony
Armory Track and Field, 216 Fort Washington

We’d love your feedback!
Please send your stories, publications, announcements, and photos to fjl2115@columbia.edu

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http://www.mailman.columbia.edu/academic-departments/population-family-health