Greetings, Fogarty Scholars!

This issue features Fogarty Scholars from all over the Americas, including the United States.

I regret to say that this will be my last issue as editor. After 28 years of working with students and scholars, I am retiring from the UC Berkeley School of Public Health. Although I will be leaving California, I shall miss you and think of you often. Putting out this newsletter has been one of the most fun and rewarding parts of my job!

My best to all of you, always,
Roberta Myers, Editor
Student Profile:  
Alexandra Lydia Hernandez

I earned my undergraduate degree in Integrative Biology and Anthropology at UC Berkeley. This education provided me with a strong background in human biology and behavior, two areas that have fascinated me from childhood. At the end of my undergraduate education, I knew that I wanted to continue my research of human biology and behavior. I wanted my work to have meaning beyond the laboratory. I found that in public health I could pursue a rigorous science that could also have an impact on the wellbeing of people. Under the guidance of Art Reingold, I explored the relationship between science and policy at UCB as I earned an MPH in Epidemiology and Biostatistics in 1999. Through my master’s paper, titled “A meta-analysis of osteoarthritis in athletes,” I was able to apply new analytical tools to a subject that had interested me from my undergraduate work.

During my undergraduate studies, I gained valuable research experience working for Allan Smith on several international studies of arsenic in drinking water. From Dr. Smith I learned epidemiological methods while applying novel techniques including molecular and genetic epidemiology. My position in his group gave me the opportunity to participate in many aspects of epidemiological research including: project management of international studies, design and development of research, questionnaire design, data collection, data analysis, and grant preparation. Through my work with the Arsenic Health Effects Research Program, I witnessed the positive impact that research can have on the lives of a study population. I spent two weeks in Chile evaluating the health effects of high levels of arsenic in drinking water on a small city populated by indigenous people. Popular theories claimed that residents were immune to the deleterious effects of arsenic because their bodies had adapted over thousands of years of exposure. We quickly discovered that these claims were false; many families showed the effects of chronic arsenic exposure. Within weeks of our return to the United States, the Chilean government changed the water supply. This powerful experience bound me to public health. I decided right then on a career in science that would be an impetus of change in health practice and health policy.

After my experience working with arsenic research at UCB, I moved to another UC campus, UC San Francisco, and worked for five years with CAPS (the UCSF Center for AIDS Prevention Studies), working with leading researchers in the field of HIV prevention. Early in 2002, I relocated to Mumbai, India, to act as the on-site statistician/epidemiologist for a behavioral intervention for the prevention of HIV among male sexually transmitted infection clinic attendees (The Mumbai Male STI Project). My responsibilities included basic research, project management, training staff in both data collection and entry, and creating protocols for data collection and data entry. This invaluable experience gave me a unique perspective on conducting research in a developing country.
My year in India solidified my desire to work in public health and focused my interest in international health. I felt that I could best use my talents and interests working in the developing world. Although conducting research in developing countries can be challenging, this research has the potential to inform public policy and impact the health of a vast number of people living with HIV. During my year in Mumbai, I was dismayed at how little we could offer HIV-infected patients. It was clear that methods proven to be effective in other settings were failing to work in the public health system in India. In this resource poor environment, it is important to identify approaches that give people the ability to prevent HIV, and for those who are positive the ability to prevent unnecessary suffering. I discovered that the best way to work toward this end was to pursue a doctoral degree.

I began the doctoral program in epidemiology at UCB in 2005. I entered that year with a great group of other students, whose support proved invaluable in classes, seminars, preparing for written and oral examination and in writing the final dissertation. The course work and exams were often quite challenging and I often learned as much from my colleagues as from the text books. I also had the opportunity to learn epidemiological methods from experts in the field. As I work with others at different institutions, I am often thankful for the rigorous training that I received at UCB from my professors. Another important learning experience that I had during the program was working as a graduate student instructor for three semesters. I taught undergraduate and graduate students epidemiology. Nothing solidifies knowledge like teaching the concept to another individual.

Finally at the end of my PhD program I began to work on my dissertation project. My main project took me back to India to work with HIV-infected individuals. This time my focus was on human papilloma-virus (HPV) among HIV-infected men who have sex with men. As with cervical cancer, HPV causes anal cancer, and individuals with HIV are at higher risk of both HPV infection and HPV-associated cancers. Targeting this virus allowed me to accomplish my goal of helping HIV-infected individuals in India because HPV-associated disease is treatable and potentially preventable through behavior modification and the recently approved HPV vaccinations. My dissertation project was the first step in developing potential health interventions for this population.

After completing my project (and dissertation) I will continue to work with UCSF. We have recently been funded by the NIH to continue the work among HIV-infected men in India evaluating HPV-associated disease, and also second study, a pilot study to evaluate the role of HPV infection in acquisition of HIV infection. I am grateful to all of the experiences that I have had that have brought me to this point in my career where I can do work that is both interesting and fulfilling. I would like to thank the Fogarty International Center for their support of my doctoral work through the AIDS/HIV International Training and Research Program (AITRP).

~ Alexandra Hernandez

Note: Alexandra was eligible for Fogarty funding as an underrepresented minority. She submitted her dissertation on December 14, 2011 and received her Ph.D. ~ Roberta.
I received my medical degree from the Escola Nacional de Saúde Pública of the Universidade Federal de Pernambuco in 1983, specializing in Public Health and Epidemiology. After a few years working for the Brazilian Unified Health System (SUS) in the State of Pernambuco, I moved to São Paulo, where I obtained a Master’s degree in Preventative Medicine from the Universidade de São Paulo in 1996 and went to work for the Emilio Ribas Infectious Diseases Institute and the São Paulo City Health Department.

In 1998 I received a Fogarty fellowship for a short term visiting at CAPS-UCSF, where I learned that I could apply for a degree at UCB with funding from Fogarty. In 1999 I went to UCB (along with my two kids, Vitor and Alice), where I obtained a Master’s degree in Public Health (2001). Later I earned a doctorate in Medicine from the Universidade de São Paulo (2005). During my doctoral studies, I spent a year at UCB writing my thesis.

A member of the Epidemiology Advisory Board of the National STI/AIDS Program, I worked as a consultant for the Brazilian Ministry of Health, Angolan National AIDS Program, and the Columbia University (ICAP) in Mozambique. For three years I was a Visiting Scientist at Harvard School of Public Health. In addition to being an Adjunct Professor at the Social Medicine Department of Santa Casa School of Medical Sciences, I am currently a consultant for the CAPES Branch of the Brazilian Ministry of Education, in charge of higher education. I am also a Tutor in distance learning course of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and the coordinator of the Forum Nacional de Coordenadores de Pós Graduação em Saúde Coletiva, which is an organization that brings together all 64 graduate programs in public health in Brazil.

My research interests include the control of the HIV / AIDS epidemic (Men who have sex with men, observational studies of AIDS-related deaths, testing and counseling, and prevention), other sexually transmitted diseases, infectious diseases surveillance and vaccine studies.

The Fogarty grant enabled me to go to UCB, and UCB has changed my life, personally and professionally. In addition to what I’ve learned in the classroom, which was more than I ever knew, the Berkeley environment allowed me to learn about people and realities from different countries of the world. I credit to this experience everything that happened in my career after that. I also thank for the wonderful friends I gained, including my mentor, Professor Arthur Reingold.

- Maria Amelia de Sousa Mascena Veras
ALUMNI UPDATES

BRAZIL

Pedro Chequer, MD, PhD (MPH ’91) is the Co-founder and Director of Brazil’s National AIDS Programme. He has also represented UNAIDS in South America and Russia, as well as coordinating the Mozambique UNAIDS Programme.

Fernanda Lessa, MD (MPH ’04) is a medical epidemiologist with the Division of Healthcare Quality Promotion, Surveillance Branch, CDC.

Luiz Loures, MD (MPH ’90) is Director of the UNAIDS Executive Office. He was previously a special advisor on AIDS to the Brazilian Ministry of Health, where he designed the program for universal access to antiretroviral drugs. He was the 2006 recipient of the Make a Difference Award from O Globo, a prominent Brazilian newspaper.

Joao Luiz Miraglia, MD (MPH ’08) is conducting clinical trials research with the Butantan Institute, a major research center in Sao Paulo.

Mauro Cunha Ramos, MD (MPH ’95) is Executive Coordinator of the Center for AIDS/STD, President of the Rio Grande do Sul Region of the Brazilian Society of Sexually Transmitted Diseases, a government official for health issues in Porto Alegre – and accredited as a dermatologist at Hospital de los Molinos.

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Marcos Espinal, MD (MPH ’91, PhD ’95) is Area Manager of Health Surveillance for Disease Prevention and Control in the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO).

PERU

Carlos Caceres, MD (MPH ’91, DrPH ’96) is a professor in the Cayetano Heredia School of Public Health and Administration and chair of the Unit of Health, Sexuality and Human Development.

Alfonso Silva Santisteban, MD (MPH ’08) is a research associate at the Institute of Studies in Health, Sexuality and Human Development in Lima.

Nicola Zetola, MD (MPH ’08) is a physician specialist in the HIV and Women’s Health Programs of the Botswana/UPenn Partnership and is co-PI for several joint research projects.

UNITED STATES

Sheri Ann Lippman (MPH ’00, PhD ‘09) is an assistant professor at the UCSF Center for AIDS Prevention Studies (CAPS).
For the past three years, the Fogarty/PEPFAR Summer Institute has welcomed summer scholars to UC Berkeley for introductory classes in epidemiology and biostatistics.

This year, 15 scholars from five countries came for eight weeks of instruction, plus

- a short course on American English pronunciation
- a Monitoring and Evaluation workshop taught by Alice Gandelman of the STD Control Branch of the California Department of Public Health.
- a two-day session on research ethics given by Art Reingold and Aubree Gordon
- a talk by Warren Winkelstein on the history of epidemiology and
- four site visits to San Francisco clinics: injection drug use, STDs, HIV surveillance, and TB.

Dr. Phuong Pham served as faculty mentor to the group, and Lisa Wong was the student liaison. As usual, Juanita Cook provided tireless support to scholars.

Art Reingold and his wife Gail Bolan hosted a welcome reception at his Oakland home and a farewell party at his vacation house at Sea Ranch (pictured) on the beautiful Sonoma coast, where certificates of completion were presented. Participating scholars are listed on the following page.
Summer Institute Participants

Brazil
Daniela Cardeal da Silva is a nurse and HIV/AIDS researcher who is also in charge of a study assessing bone density and body composition. She was supported by funding from Brazil.

Kenya
Stella Njuguna is the lead research pharmacist in a joint UCSF/KEMRI (Kenya Research Medical Institute) study, CIS (the Couples Intervention Study).

Uganda
Barnabas Bakamutumaho, MD, is a lab researcher and rapid response manager at the Uganda Virus Research Institute of the Ministry of Health.
Gloria Ikilezi, MD, is a study coordinator for a randomized clinical trial comparing malaria incidence in HIV-infected children to different forms of antiretroviral therapies in rural areas.
Andrew Mugisa, MD, is a coordinator at the Infectious Disease Institute for a project to strengthen delivery systems for quality HIV/AIDS services to hard-to-access areas of Uganda.
Edith Nyakaana, MD, is a practicing physician in the Department of Internal Medicine of Mulago National Referral and Teaching Hospital at Makerere University.

Vietnam
Thanh Ly An is a researcher for CREATA (Center for Research and Training on HIV/AIDS) within the Hanoi Medical University.
Hoang Duc Bui, MD, is in charge of HIV/AIDS surveillance and evaluation at the Vietnam Authority of HIV/AIDS Control in the Ministry of Health.
Thi Phuong Do is a Project Officer for the Harverd Medical School AIDS Initiative in Vietnam.
Hai Chau Hoang is a member of the Strategic Information Team and the Officer-in-Charge of the Quality Improvement Program for the Vietnam branch of FHI (Family Health International).
Thi Kim Ngan Nguyen is a teaching assistant in the Hanoi School of Public Health and a strategic information specialist in the CDC/HSPH collaboration project.
Thi Minh Hue Tran has a Master of Health Economics degree and works as a researcher at PHR (Partners in Health Research).
Thu Huong Hoang is a monitoring and evaluation specialist for an INGO (Save the Children) and works with HIV infected and affected children and youth.
Ngoc Kinh Ho, MD, is a health specialist of Plan International in Vietnam.

Zimbabwe
Lucy Mupfumi is a TB research studies coordinator at the Biomedical and Research Training Institute (BRTI).

Fogarty Scholars Edith Nyakaana and Stella Njuguna are staying until May 2012 to complete their MPH degrees in Epidemiology at UC Berkeley.
News from All Over

New Student Resources on International Office Website

The U.C. Berkeley International Office (formerly known as Services for International Students and Scholars—SISS) has recently updated its website at http://internationaloffice.berkeley.edu to include information on arrival in the US and living in Berkeley. Resources include an arrival guide, plus details about house-hunting, travel, and cultural adjustment.

Happy Holidays from Art and the Epidemiology staff!

Left to right: Roberta Myers, Art Reingold, Eugene Konagaya, Juanita Cook, Diane Hinkly

Photo Credit: Sharon Norris