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What is it like to be an International Student at West Chester University?

Master of public health (M.P.H.) student Akinmade Adepoju has settled comfortably into campus life at West Chester University (WCU), after traveling a far distance from his homeland of Nigeria. He explains that, like many, he was drawn to WCU because it is a well-known, affordable school with a good MPH program. He describes that, despite missing his family and friends, the transition to American culture, work, and campus life has been smooth for him. In 2007 the Institute of International Education reported that the number of international students enrolled in colleges and universities in the United States increased by 3%. The majority of the 582,984 international students in the 2006-07 academic year came from India. In 2008 WCU welcomed students from various countries around the world such as India, Bangladesh, Japan, South Korea, China, Kenya, Canada, Ukraine, France, Nepal, Thailand, and Bulgaria. Akinmade offers sound advice to the new incoming international students — “stay informed.”

One easy way to stay informed is to develop a strong social network. Research reveals that without a good social network, international students can easily feel lost while away from home. WCU offers many outlets to build social networks; the Center for International Programs (CIP) is a good source to find information on international activities and concerns. It also offers guidance on topics such as cross-cultural advising, immigration, housing, and personal/academic counseling. Through the orientation that is offered by the CIP, students are able to meet other international students. It is clear that international students at WCU come to the campus to join a budding community of friendship and support, thus making the transition more fluid.

Alumni Accomplishments

Joy Dvornicich, M.P.H., West Chester University, 2007

- Member of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster
- Member of the Philadelphia and Bucks Counties Medical Reserve Corps (MRC)
- Task Leader, BioWatch Training Course for the State of New Jersey Phase I Sampling Teams
- Task Leader, Minnesota Public Health Department Public Health Hazard Vulnerability Assessment
- Evaluator, Bucks County Points of Dispensing Exercise (POD)
- Subject matter expert, port-wide risk management/mitigation/business continuity and resumption of trade plan for the Delaware River and Bay Sector
- Task Leader, Pennsylvania FY2008 State/Urban Areas Homeland Security Program Assessment and Strategic Planning Initiative
- Controller / State Emergency Management Agency Missouri SNS/CRI Full-Scale Exercise

M.P.H. Poster Session

The 2008 fall master of public health poster session will be held Friday, December 5 from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. in Philips Autograph Library, second floor, Philips Memorial Building. Students who plan on presenting their research are requested to contact Dr. James Brenner at 610-436-3357 or jbrenner@wcupa.edu immediately to let him know of their participation in the poster session.

Summer Class Offering 435/581 Mexican Culture and Health

Culture Immersion Trip to Guanajuato, Mexico May 27 – June 2, 2009

Dr. Debra Bill will be facilitating an immersion health course to Mexico. The travel course is open to undergraduate and graduate students. The workshop is designed for health and human service students and professionals who are interested in learning more about Mexican health, nutrition, culture, and history in order to better meet the health needs of Mexican and Mexican-American families who live in the Chester County area.

In Mexico, workshop participants will have the opportunity to visit health care, wellness, and nutrition facilities; talk with health/governmental officials, and learn about the history and culture of Mexico as well as the needs of Mexican



and Mexican-American families in our region. Three or six credits will be given, depending on the depth of the project. Interested M.P.H. community health track students can register for six credits—three count towards the Transcultural Health course requirement and three for an elective. This course counts as two electives for all other tracks. Students can

also register for a three-credit option. Additional fee required for travel to Mexico. For additional information, Dr. Debra Bill, dbill@wcupa.edu

Attention M.P.H. Students!

Students who were accepted into the M.P.H. program provisionally and required to complete MAT 121 Statistics must complete this course prior to enrollment in HEA 526 Biostatistics. For degree candidacy approval, the provisional requirements must be met. Students who began the M.P.H. program during the fall 2007 semester or after are required to complete 45 hours of courses for the M.P.H. degree.

Dr. Sheehan Shares her Sabbatical

Dr. Maura Sheehan, CIH has been on sabbatical for the Fall 2008 semester. She is spending the majority of her time conducting research with colleagues at the University of Iowa's Department of Occupational and Environmental Health. As shown in the picture, Dr. Sheehan is working with colleague Dr. Tom Peters generating aerosols in the nanoparticle size range. This work will be used to help develop new test equipment and methods to measure nanoparticles in the workplace and other environments. Dr. Sheehan will be sharing what she has learned in her future classes as well as continuing her research in the control of worker exposure to airborne particles.



M.P.H. and nutrition students volunteer with Dr. Debra Bill and Dr. Mary Beth Gilboy at the "Wellness and Nutrition Corner" they designed as part of Binational Health Week in Kennett Square, Pa.



Global Perspectives in Education, Environment and Health— An Experiential Visit to People's Republic of China

A group of 12 undergraduate students (ten from West Chester University and two from Holy Family University (HFU)) visited the People's Republic of China (PRC) from May 12 - 24, 2008 under the guidance of WCU professors Wei Wei Cai (elementary education), Gopal Sankaran (public health), and Charles Shorten (environmental health). Professor Cai organized and coordinated the entire trip. All the students were enrolled for six credits in the WCU combined course, Global Perspectives in Education, Environment and Health. In Beijing, at Capital Normal University (CNU), Dr. Shorten presented an invited lecture on the importance of water management.

Thereafter, the 12 students met with students from CNU in a group discussion, facilitated by WCU faculty members, and discussed a variety of topics including cultural practices, college life, co-curricular activities, career tracks, and entertainment! Everyone enjoyed this valuable learning experience.



Professors Wei Wei Cai, Charles Shorten, and Gopal Sankaran (all in second row) with faculty and students from West Chester University, Holy Family University and Capital Normal University, Beijing (Photo courtesy of Capital Normal University)



Students from Capital Normal University, West Chester University, and Holy Family University enjoyed exchanging viewpoints at a group discussion at Capital Normal University, Beijing. (Photo courtesy of Capital Normal University)

In Beijing, the group also visited a middle school and participated in group activities with students in English and Arts classes. The visit to a hospital and a research center (affiliated with Peking Union Medical College) allowed the group to learn about and experience Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) techniques such as acupuncture, cupping, and massage. The group visited the TCM pharmacy and saw first-hand how medicines are prepared individually for each patient. The co-existence of both TCM and Western Medicine in PRC led to a discussion and comparative analysis of the health care systems in PRC and the United States. An additional visit to a large waste water management plant highlighted the rapid strides PRC is making in this area. The visiting group received a traditional Peking duck dinner hosted by the China University Alumni Association.

During the visit to the cities of Xi'an and Yichang (on the banks of the Yangtze River), the group met with students and faculty from China Three Gorges University. Cultural trips for the group included visits to the Great Wall, Forbidden City, and Summer Palace in Beijing, Terracotta Warriors Museum, Provincial Chinese Museum in Xi'an, and the Three Gorges Dam in Yichang.

The Sichuan earthquake on May 12, with its heavy toll in terms of human lives and suffering, provided an unexpected opportunity for the group to share the immense sorrow and grief of their hosts. As one student reflected, "I learned that we all look the same when we smile; we all look the same when we cry." Before leaving PRC, the group made a contribution to the China Earthquake Relief Fund.

This excellent cross-cultural learning experience was best summed up in the words of another student, "I learned that people may be different, but their kindness has no language barrier."

Tablet PCs for M.P.H. Field Work Experiences

A limited number of tablet PCs are available for M.P.H. students use during applied learning experiences, field work experiences and research projects. If you are interested in using a Tablet PC for these field experiences, please contact Dr. Debra Bill at dbill@wcupa.edu. The design of the tablet PC with its handwriting conversion to text as well as voice recognition to text may enhance the students' performance during field experiences.

Mental Health is Public Health

Caroline L. Geiser, M.P.H Program

Learning is the beginning of wealth. Learning is the beginning of health. Learning is the beginning of spirituality. Searching and learning is where the miracle process all begins.

REMINDER

Students are strongly encouraged to submit news, views, and experiences for publication in the M.P.H. Connections. Please contact Dr. Sankaran (gsankaran@wcupa.edu) or Jenna Derr (jd591689@wcupa.edu) with any questions

Even though it's often misunderstood and frequently not diagnosed, mental health has grown globally as an important focus within the field of public health. The rising prevalence and disability rates associated with mental illness, along with increasing costs of treatment and care, impact productivity and quality of life for individuals of all ages, families, businesses, and communities.

The public health field, working in tandem with the mental health field can help to increase public awareness of the issues, open doors and funding resources for research, and expand outreach within communities that lack access to care and education. One cost effective and valuable community-based program that warrants attention from the health care industry is the practice of utilizing mental health support groups as a supplement to traditional professional care. My HEA650 Applied Learning Experience project focuses on mental health support groups, specifically peer-led, community-based groups, and examines the relationship of group leadership to the effectiveness of this type of modality.

Within the mental health field, attention has been brought to the positive effect that professionally led psychotherapy groups and social support groups (such as AA and NA) have on individuals in ways ranging from solving personal problems and changing addictive behaviors to supporting people with mental health diagnoses, including depression, anxiety, and bipolar disorder. We know that the group structure is effective for several reasons, the first being the power of the group to create bonds between members dealing with like conditions and issues. The second reason for success seems to be the leadership qualities of the professional therapist or peer/volunteer facilitator.

Research has shown that leadership traits common to and important for the professionally led group's success include the following:

1. Establishing and sustaining a cohesive environment
2. Providing support through encouragement and interest
3. Providing control and direction
4. Providing respect and confidentiality

Due to a lack of research, the same can't be said or hasn't been proven within support groups that have peer or "volunteer" leadership. This project poses the following question: if we know that the group structure shows positive results, regardless of what type of leadership is in place, can a peer/volunteer facilitator be used to the same effect as a professional leader?

Using a quantitative research design, a survey tool will gather information from mental health support group members in Delaware to measure their perceptions of the leadership traits that impact outcomes and their participation in the group. The study population will consist of members of ten peer-led depression, anxiety, and survivors of suicide support groups. All of the groups have been in existence for at least two years, are held in three Delaware counties, only serve adults, and are led by peer volunteers. Group members are required to have the diagnosed mental illness related to the group type and have received recommendations to also be under care of a professional mental health provider. All peer/volunteer group facilitators have also had a previous mental health diagnosis and have had previous experience participating as a support group member. Some of the peer facilitators had formal support group training.

Mental Health is Public Health (Cont'd)

The survey was structured with four sections of questions: (1) demographic information (2) three subscales from the Group Environment Scale (GES), cohesion, leadership support and leadership control, (3) a third section of questions focusing on leadership traits of confidentiality and respect, and (4) related to perceived behavioral/emotional change outcomes.

This study will show that traits that have been found effective for professional therapy group leaders will hold true for peer leaders of mental health support groups.

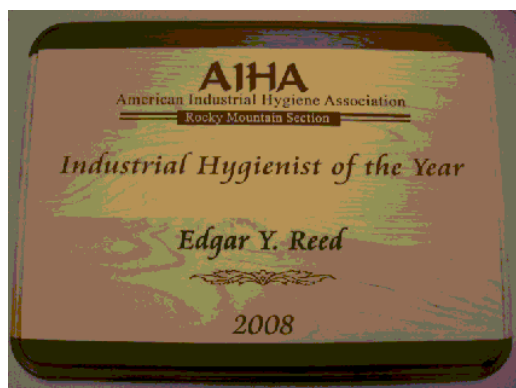
Several levels of analysis will be reported:

- Measures of Central Tendency or Variation, and Significance will be computed for the first section of the survey's descriptive measures to determine whether controls for extraneous variables are necessary.
- Three domains from the GES survey will be statistically modeled to produce an overall score for each respondent. The scores will determine whether the three domains show a positive relationship between professional and peer-led facilitators.
- Correlation coefficients, (either Pearson's or Spearman's measures) will determine confidence intervals and show the strength of the association between the descriptive survey measures, outcome measures, and leadership domain scores of participants in the respective groups.



By showing a relationship, we can develop program models for training peer/volunteer facilitators, can further emphasize the effectiveness of mental health peer-led support groups within the health care community, and create opportunities for funding resources in order to pursue more in-depth longitudinal studies of a similar focus.

Congratulations!



Edgar Y. Reed, MS ('95), CIH, CSP, an alumnus of the master's program in environmental health and a consulting industrial hygienist with Liberty Mutual Insurance Company, was honored as the **2008 Industrial Hygienist of the Year** by the American Industrial Hygiene Association, Rocky Mountain Section. Congratulations, Ed! We are very proud of your accomplishment!



Gopal Sankaran was awarded the 2008 Mid-Career Award in recognition of his Distinguished Mid-Career Achievements in International Health by the International Health Section of the American Public Health Association in San Diego, California, on October 27.

Faculty Scholarly Accomplishments

Publications

- Maxwell, J.R., & **Bill, D. E.** (2008). "Developing a Brucellosis Public Health Information and Awareness Campaign in Iraq," *Military Medicine*, 173 (1), 79-84.
- DeRigne, L., Porterfield, S., & **Metz, S.** (2008). The influence of health insurance on parent reported unmet mental health needs of children. *Maternal and Child Health Journal*; May 16 online.
- Wyrwich, K. W., **Metz, S. M.**, Kroenke, K., Tierney, W. M., Babu, A. N., & Wolinsky, F. D. (2007). Triangulating patient and clinician perspectives on clinically important differences in health-related quality of life among patients with heart disease. *Health Services Research*; 42(6 Part I): 2257-2274.
- Metz, S. M.**, Wyrwich, K. W., Babu, A. N., Kroenke, K., Tierney, W. M., & Wolinsky, F. D. (2007). Validity of patient-reported health-related quality of life global ratings of change using structural equation modeling. *Quality of Life Research*; 16(7): 1193-1202.
- Wyrwich, K. W., **Metz, S. M.**, Kroenke, K., Tierney, W. M., Babu, A. N., Wolinsky, F. D. (2007). Measuring patient and clinician perspectives to evaluate change in health-related quality of life among patients with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*; 22 (2):161-170.
- Sankaran, G.** (2009). From Alma-Ata to Millennium Development Goals: Status of Women's Health in the 21st Century. In Padmini Murthy and Clyde Lanford Smith (Eds.), *Women's Global Health and Human Rights*. Sudbury, MA: Jones and Bartlett. (forthcoming)
- Brinton, E. A., Hopkins, P. N., & **Sankaran, G.** (2009) Cardiovascular Disease in Women: Risk Factors and Risk Reduction. In Padmini Murthy and Clyde Lanford Smith (Eds.), *Women's Global Health and Human Rights*. Sudbury, MA: Jones and Bartlett. (forthcoming)

Presentations

- Bill, D. E.** (2008). "Tablet PCs: New Technology Tools for Fieldwork in Public Health Practice." The national Society of Public Health Professions (SOPHE) Mid-year Scientific Meeting in Chicago on May 22,.
- Sankaran, G.** (2008). "Foundations of Epidemiology and Descriptive Epidemiology." Guest lectures to Physician Assistant Studies students at Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on August 19 and 26.
- Sankaran, G.** (2008). "Fundamentals of Descriptive Epidemiology." Guest lecture to medical students at Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on August 28.
- Murthy, P., Martin, R.S., **Sankaran, G.** (2008). "NGOs without borders: Changing role in global health and need for greater collaboration." American Public Health Association 136th Annual Meeting and Expo, in San Diego, California on October 29.
- Sankaran, G.**, McHenry, B., and Murthy P. (2008). "NGOs without borders: Readiness for collaboration and models for developing collaborative partnerships." American Public Health Association 136th Annual Meeting and Expo, in San Diego, California on October 29.
- Sankaran, G.** (2008). Moderator of panel discussion on Child Survival & Child Health and NGOs without Borders. American Public Health Association 136th Annual Meeting and Expo, in San Diego, California on October 27 and 29.

External Service

- Sankaran, G.** Elected Governing Councilor, American Public Health Association (Affiliation: International Health Section) (Second term: 2008-2010)
- Sankaran, G.** (2008 -). Member, Community Advisory Board, WHYY (a Public Broadcasting Service affiliate).
- Sankaran, G.** (2008). External Member, Thesis Committee for Victor Cueto, Jr. *Effectiveness of the PCOM Healthy Lifestyle Program on Encouraging Lifestyle Change in Overweight/Obese Urban Underserved African American Women*. Thesis for master's degree in biomedical sciences, Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine. Participated in the thesis defense on June 26.

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