



SPRING 2010 MIRT NEWS

Multidisciplinary International Research Training (MIRT) Program

Striving to Eliminate Health Disparities

*"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."
—Martin Luther King Jr.*

MEET UW MIRT 2010 FELLOWS

"I cannot ask for more than the chance to develop skills in researching public health at the international level as well as the opportunity to learn more about health inequalities that exist all over the globe. I truly believe that MIRT will provide a fertile ground for my success as a future public health leader and physician." —**Alvin Tran, MIRT 2010 Ethiopia**

"It will be my first time leaving the country. MIRT is such a unique program that will give me a first-hand understanding of a new culture while developing my research skills in an international health and science setting. I can only imagine the opportunities, challenges, and experiences that await me!" —**Jolana Gollero, MIRT 2010 Australia**

"I expect that my participation as a MIRT fellow will help me to further define my research interests and will enhance my understanding of how health services and health research can contribute to the well-being of a population." —**Kristen Heitzinger, MIRT 2010 Chile**

"I look forward to immersing myself completely in a language I have studied for years but never fully been able to use. Most of all, I hope to give my time and effort to a project that can be of some good to the people who share their country, stories, and lives with me this summer." —**Laura Paiva, MIRT 2010 Peru**

MIRT 2010 fellows, alumni, and faculty attending the 2010 pre-travel orientation



MEET UW MIRT 2010 FELLOWS

It is with great pleasure that we introduce our 2010 fellows to the UW MIRT community. The new fellows are eager to begin their fellowships and continue the legacy of the UW MIRT Program in Australia, Chile, Ethiopia, and Peru. Hope you enjoy meeting them!



Stefanie Czerwinski
Undergraduate, Florida Atlantic U
MIRT site: **AUSTRALIA**

Stefanie's Personal Statement

My name is Stefanie Czerwinski, and I am currently an undergraduate student at Florida Atlantic University. I am majoring in Biological Sciences, and I would eventually like to attend medical school. My goals as an undergraduate student are, besides my course work, getting more experiences that will deepen my understanding of healthcare related professions. I feel that it is important for me to expose myself to all facets of science before I decide on my final career path. Since I have not had the opportunity to be part of any research program or gain any other type of research experience, I am hoping for the MIRT program to expand my horizons and give me an insight into the world of scientific research. As for my personal interests, I enjoy playing classical piano. I also enjoy playing handball, a type of European group sport that can be compared to a mixture of rugby and soccer. An additional interest of mine is traveling and getting to know different cultures and views of life. Consequently, besides learning about scientific research and the issues addressed at my assigned research site, I am excited about the opportunity offered by the MIRT program of discovering a new culture.

Michelle's Personal Statement



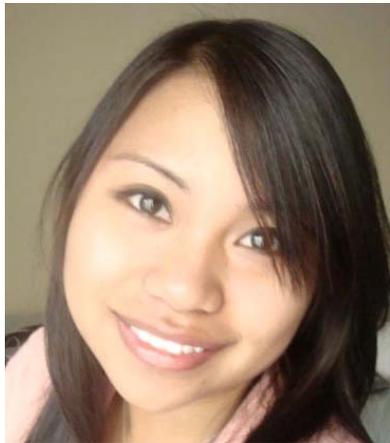
Michelle Vo
Undergraduate, SEATTLE U
MIRT site: **AUSTRALIA**

My name is Michelle Vo. I am a junior diagnostic ultrasound major at Seattle University. I am proud native Seattleite, and I hail specifically from the Burien/Tukwila area. Though I love my hometown's coffee and running trails, I find myself looking to expand and grow outside of my roots; I find myself looking for a new challenge. I am interested in MIRT because it poses a whole new set of challenges - patience with data collection, mental strength with research analysis, and cultural awareness and interaction.

Through the MIRT program, I expect to gain new research skills, a deeper sense of public health and epidemiology, as well as a new cultural understanding of Australia.

“The purpose of life is not to be happy. It is to be useful, to be honorable, to be compassionate, to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well.” —Ralph Waldo Emerson

Jolana's Personal Statement

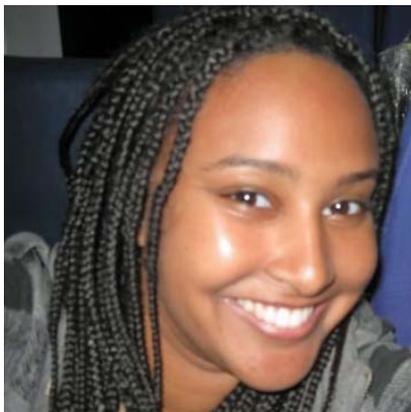


Jolana Gollero
Undergraduate, UW
MIRT site: **AUSTRALIA**

Hello! My name is Jolana Gollero and I am currently a third year student at the University of Washington, majoring in Biology with a focus on Physiology. Born and raised in Pearl City, Hawai'i, I have to say that I am adapting to Washington's weather quite nicely. I am a sister of Chi Sigma Alpha National Sorority, Inc. as well an active member of Hui Hoaloha `Ulana, the Hawai'i Club at the UW, both of which have created a little home away from home. I have recently started working in the Clinical Core Lab at the Benaroya Research Institute where they process blood for the isolation of DNA, plasma, serum, and cells that are used in various research projects. When I have the time, I enjoy wrestling, snorkeling, hiking, and baking (this compensates for my lack of cooking skills).

I am extremely excited to be a part of the MIRT program this summer! It will be my first time leaving the country. MIRT is such a unique program that will give me a first-hand understanding of a new culture while developing my research skills in an international health and science setting. I am honored to be a part of MIRT and I can only imagine the opportunities, challenges, and experiences that await me!

Abinnet's Personal Statement



Abinnet Ainalem
Undergraduate, UW
MIRT site: **AUSTRALIA**

My name is Abinnet Ainalem and I am a 3rd year student at UW majoring in Biochemistry and Public Health. I am interested in gaining a deeper understanding of international based public health research and experiencing new cultures and people. My long-term goal is to become a medical doctor, and I plan on serving underserved populations in developing countries. I am very excited to go to Australia this summer. I hope to learn more about epidemiology, make new friends, and gain enough research experience to publish my work and present at a national conference.

Kristen's Personal Statement



Kristen Heitzinger
Graduate, UW
MIRT site: **CHILE**

My name is Kristen Heitzinger. I am a second year master's student in epidemiology at the University of Washington and will be beginning a PhD in the same department in the fall. My primary academic interest is international epidemiology, specifically in Latin America and francophone Africa. I have already participated in health-related research projects in Mexico and Peru, each of which were fantastic opportunities to learn about the burden of disease, health services, institutions, and culture of the country and region. I expect no less from the MIRT experience! I am very much looking forward to working with and learning from our colleagues in Chile in addition to applying the knowledge I have gained through my public health coursework to a real life research project. I expect that my participation as a MIRT fellow will help me to further define my research interests and will enhance my understanding of how health services and health research can contribute to the well-being of a population.

Sonia's Personal Statement



Sonia Parra
Undergraduate, Yale U
MIRT site: **CHILE**

Hello! My name is Sonia Parra, and I am a junior at Yale University majoring in Biomedical Engineering. As a proud Mexican-American, raised in the culturally Hispanic city of San Antonio, TX, I have always been interested in issues concerning Latino healthcare and hope to apply to medical school in the coming year. Since I was young, I have volunteered at local clinics in San Antonio that primarily serve underrepresented populations and continue to return every summer as a college student. In school, most of my time is devoted to both promoting Latino culture and involvement on campus as a staff member at Yale's Latino Cultural Center and conducting independent biomedical research, primarily in the field of Bioimaging.

Through MIRT I hope to combine my love for research with my passion for Latino healthcare by conducting public health research in Punta Arenas, Chile. I am excited for the new skills I will learn and a chance to study Latino healthcare abroad. My hope is to incorporate what I gain from this experience into what will be my life-long dedication to medical research.

Alvin's Personal Statement



Alvin Tran
Undergraduate, UW
MIRT site: **ETHIOPIA**

My name is Alvin Tran and I am a graduating senior at the University of Washington. Here at the UW, I am pursuing a dual-bachelor's degree in Public Health and Medical Anthropology & Global Health (MAGH). In addition to academics, I am currently a research assistant involved in a nutrition-related study at the Seattle Children's Hospital. I am also heavily involved with two student organizations on campus: the Minority Association of Pre-Health Students (MAPS) and the Undergraduate Student Public Health Association (USPHA). As the MAPS President of the 2008-2009 academic year, I successfully led our organization towards our greatest achievement--the MAPS Chapter of the Year Award during the Student National Medical Association (SNMA) National Conference in New Orleans, Louisiana last spring.

I am incredibly honored to have been chosen as a 2010 MIRT Fellow and look forward to the wonderful opportunity that lies ahead. I cannot ask for more than the chance to develop the skills in researching public health at the international level as well as the opportunity to learn more about health inequalities that exist all over the globe. I truly believe that MIRT will provide a fertile ground for my success as a future public health leader and physician. This summer, I will take advantage of every opportunity to learn more about current public health issues as well as the incredible culture of Ethiopia!

Wint's Personal Statement



Wint Wai
Undergraduate, UW
MIRT site: **ETHIOPIA**

My name is Wint Su Wai and I am a senior majoring in Environmental Health. After graduation, I would like to continue my education in Medicine and want to be a pediatrician as a life-long career. My interest areas are toxicology, infectious diseases, and global health focusing on maternal and child health which I would like to pursue as my MPH degree. My dream career would be working a physician as a part of US public health commission corps serving underserved communities. I was born and raised in Burma and have two younger sisters. My family and I immigrated to US 4 years ago and, it has been my positive life-changing experience. I am thrilled and excited to be going to Ethiopia working on a public health research project as a 2010 MIRT fellow because I will have an opportunity to learn different culture and social structures and, it will be my invaluable experience for me especially for my future career and academic goals. I am looking forward to learning and contributing as much as I can as a MIRT Fellow.

RJ's Personal Statment



RJ Dhami
Undergraduate, UW
MIRT site: **ETHIOPIA**

Hello MIRT Community! I, RJ Dhami, am a junior at the University of Washington majoring in bioengineering and eventually planning on going to either grad school in biomedical engineering or med school. Of particular academic interest to me is the development of robust, accurate, distributable, point-of-care diagnostics. Development of such technologies would vastly improve the quality of health care in developing regions of the world. If I do go on to grad school this is a field that I would like to contribute to. When I am not immersed with coursework I enjoy playing basketball or soccer or playing some riffs with my guitar.

I am incredibly excited for this upcoming summer in Ethiopia as a MIRT fellow. Reading the reflection papers of past participants this experience seems as if it truly will be remarkable. Conducting clinical health research all the while experiencing the ins and outs of another culture will be enlightening and enjoyable, though no doubt challenging. Also, contributing to MIRT's core mission, striving to eliminate global health disparities, is a means through which we as students can use our skills to better the world around us. I have high hopes for this summer and have no doubt that when I arrive back on American soil in late August, I will be able to look back upon this experience as one of the defining moments of my time as student at UW.



Kaylee Knowles
Undergraduate, WWU
MIRT site: **PERU**

Kaylee's Personal Statement

My name is Kaylee Knowles. I was born and raised in Walla Walla, Washington. I am currently a senior attending Western Washington University in Bellingham, majoring in Community Health with a minor in Spanish. I am an active volunteer as a member of Women's Empowerment and Violence Education, and as the president of Viking Community Builders, a campus club committed to fostering communication and respect between WWU students and Bellingham community members. In addition I work as a peer advisor for WWU International Programs and Exchanges, giving me the opportunity to assist incoming and outgoing exchange students.

My first introduction to public health was during my study abroad in Ecuador in winter 2008. During this time I realized my desire to help others via work in global health, particularly against poverty-related diseases. Aside from public health, I am a passionate participant in music and theater. Rock climbing, hiking, and playing outside keep me active. I am looking forward to a life enriching experience in Peru.

Laura's Personal Statement



Laura Paiva
Undergraduate, California State U
MIRT site: **PERU**

As I write this, I still cannot believe I am about to participate in the only summer research program I really wanted. I am a senior at California State University, Fresno, and a member of the Smittcamp Family Honors College, a Piano Performance Major contemplating graduation in December 2010, but most importantly, I want to be a physician. I have been working on pre-med prerequisites since 2007, and am nearing application to medical schools, but before I commit to a program, I want to explore public health research. I discovered the UW MIRT program during the beginning of my search for summer internships, and it captured my imagination at once.

I am not a stranger to traveling for a purpose, so it is with little apprehension, and primarily with excitement that I look forward to this research experience. I anticipate learning a lot about health, research, and Peru, and a little about myself. I look forward to immersing myself completely in a language I have studied for years but never fully been able to use. Most of all, I hope to give my time and effort to a project that can be of some good to the people who share their country, stories, and lives with me this summer.

"We are the creative force of our life, and through our own decisions rather than our conditions, if we carefully learn to do certain things, we can accomplish those goals."—Stephen Covey



MIRT Program faculty and staff were pleased to host a visiting scholar, Assistant Professor Wipawan Pensuksan, PhD candidate from Chulalongkorn University in Thailand.

During her visit, Pensuksan presented a research seminar from part of her dissertation work entitled **“A peer-drinking group brief motivational intervention for reducing alcohol use and consequences in Thai male undergraduate students.”**

Excessive alcohol consumption, particularly among young males, is an important global health problem, in part because of the increased risks of intentional and non-intentional injuries, uses of illicit drug, crime, and psychiatric disorders. There are no data available to evaluate the extent to which interventions are effective in reducing hazardous/harmful alcohol consumption among young males in Thailand.

Using a quasi-experimental study design Pensuksan studied two student groups assessed at baseline and at two time points post-intervention. Participants were students enrolled in two public universities and who reported alcohol consumption during the current academic year. Students in one university were assigned to an assessment-only study group (n=110); and students in the other university were assigned to a 2-hour peer-drinking group motivational intervention (PD-GMI) (n=115).

The intervention was designed to (1) increase the awareness of risks associated with hazardous/harmful alcohol consumption; (2) enhance students’ motivation to change their drinking behaviors; and (3) encourage harm reduction strategies during episodes of alcohol consumption. Alcohol consumption and adverse consequences were assessed using the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT) and the Rutgers Alcohol Problem Index (RAPI).

The results of the study showed that students receiving the intervention had significant reductions in mean AUDIT scores; 50.4% at baseline to 1-month and 61.2% at baseline to 3-month post-intervention. Their mean RAPI scores were also reduced; 42.0% at baseline to 1-month and 42.9% at baseline to 3-month post-intervention. Reductions in alcohol consumption and the prevalence of harmful alcohol consumption patterns were statistically significant among students in the intervention group versus those in the control group. The reductions remained after adjustments for baseline differences.

In conclusion, Pensuksan underscored the efficacy of the PD-GMI intervention for reducing alcohol consumption and adverse consequences among Thai male students although study finds should be confirmed in large study populations. Noting the short follow up period post intervention, Pensuksan stressed the need for additional trials to determine the stability of this innovative intervention and to test strategies to strengthen and maintain the long term benefits of the intervention

Her study findings were published in the International Journal of Drug Policy earlier this year and presented at the International Harm Reduction Conference in Liverpool, UK.

“Whenever you are to do a thing, though it can never be known but to yourself, ask yourself how you would act were all the world looking at you and act accordingly.”—Thomas Jefferson

Every year UW MIRT fellows and faculty work on diverse research projects that address the needs of the communities of each site. In the Science Corner we provide synopses of study findings from selected sites. In this issue we present two studies from MIRT 2008 in Ethiopia and Thailand. Please visit the MIRT Program website to read the complete list of abstracts.

OPEN ACCESS Freely available online

 PLOS one

Access to Water Source, Latrine Facilities and Other Risk Factors of Active Trachoma in Ankober, Ethiopia

Ilya Golovaty^{1,9}, Larissa Jones^{1,9}, Bizu Gelaye^{1*}, Melkie Tilahun², Habtamu Belete³, Abera Kumie³, Yemane Berhane^{2,3}, Michelle A. Williams¹

Objective: This study aims to determine the prevalence and correlates of active trachoma in Ankober, Ethiopia.

Methods: A cross-sectional community-based study was conducted during July 2007. A total of 507 children (ages 1–9 years), from 232 households were included in the study. All children were examined for trachoma by ophthalmic nurses using the WHO simplified clinical grading system. Interviews and observations were used to assess risk factors. Logistic regression procedures were used to determine associations between potential risk factors and signs of active trachoma.

Results: Overall, the prevalence of active trachoma was found to be 53.9% (95%CI 49.6%–58.2%). Presence of fly-eye (fly contact with the eyelid margin during eye examination) (Odds Ratio (OR) = 4.03 95% CI 1.40–11.59), absence of facial cleanliness (OR = 7.59; 95%CI 4.60–12.52), an illiterate mother (OR = 5.88; 95%CI 2.10–15.95), lack of access to piped water (OR = 2.19; 95%CI 1.14–6.08), and lack of access to latrine facilities (OR = 4.36; 95%CI 1.49–12.74) were statistically significantly associated with increased risk of active trachoma.

Conclusion: Active trachoma among children 1–9 years of age in Ankober is highly prevalent and significantly associated with a number of risk factors including access to water and latrine facilities. Trachoma prevention programs that include improved access to water and sanitation, active fly control, and hygiene education are recommended to lower the burden of trachoma in Ankober, Ethiopia.

THE JOURNAL OF Obstetrics and Gynaecology Research



A case–control study of preterm delivery risk factors according to clinical subtypes and severity

Marisa Ip^{1,*}, Elmera Peyman^{1,*}, Vitool Lohsoonthorn^{1,2} and Michelle A. Williams^{1,3}

Objective: To examine risk factors of preterm delivery (PTD) among Thai women.

Methods: Our case–control study included 467 term controls and 467 PTD cases. PTD was studied in aggregate and in subgroups (i.e. spontaneous preterm labor and delivery [SPTD], preterm premature rupture of membrane [PPROM], medically indicated preterm delivery [MIPTD], moderate preterm delivery [32–36 weeks], and very preterm delivery [<32 weeks]). We used multivariable logistic regression procedures to estimate odds ratio (OR) and 95% confidence intervals (CI) of potential PTD risk factors.

Results: Advanced maternal age (≥ 35 years) was associated with a 2.27-fold increased PTD risk overall (95%CI: 1.40, 3.68); and with a 3.79-fold increased risk of MIPTD (95%CI: 1.89, 7.59). Young maternal age (<20 years) was associated with a 2.07-fold increased risk of SPTD (95%CI: 1.19, 3.61). Prior history of PTD was associated with a 3.64-fold increased PTD risk overall (95%CI: 1.87, 7.09), and with a 5.69-fold increased risk of MIPTD (95%CI: 2.44, 13.24). No prenatal care was associated with all PTD subtypes. Lean women (body mass index < 18.5 kg/m²), compared with normal weight women (18.5–24.9 kg/m²), had a 1.70-fold increased risk of PTD (95%CI: 1.21, 2.39). Risk of SPTD (OR = 2.16, 95%CI: 1.44, 3.24) and very PTD (OR = 2.45, 95%CI: 1.35, 4.45) were also elevated in lean women.

Conclusions: Maternal age, pre-pregnancy body mass index, prior history of PTD and no utilization of prenatal care were covariates identified in this study as risk factors for PTD. Our findings also suggest heterogeneity in risk factors for clinical subtypes of PTD.

Earlier this year some UW MIRT 2009 fellows presented their MIRT research findings at the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) meeting in San Diego, CA. We are happy to report that our fellows (all undergraduates) were invited to present their work in the general poster session which typically showcases works of postdoctoral fellows and faculty members. It is rare for undergraduates to present their research at such academically competitive conference. On related news, two MIRT 2009 fellows will be presenting their 2009 summer research at the Society for Epidemiologic Research (SER) Meeting in Seattle in a few weeks. We are proud of you all!



l to r: Nicole, Alyssa, & Nam

Alumni Update

Let Us Know How You're Doing

Do you have an update or new photo to share with us?

We would love to hear from you!

NAME: _____

UPDATE: _____

E-mail Address: _____

NB: We have made it easier for our alumni to make updates directly online. Please go to the MIRT Web Page www.depts.washington.edu/mirt and click on the Alumni Update.



Striving to Eliminate Health Disparities

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MIRT is a national program designed to encourage students to pursue careers in biomedical and behavioral research. This program provides support for undergraduates and graduate students to receive research training in an international setting. MIRT is funded by the National Center on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NCMHD) and Fogarty International Center (FIC) of the National Institutes of Health. The UW-MIRT Program has been developed in collaboration with Dillard University, Xavier University, and Western Washington University. The program focuses on population-based health research in developing countries and builds on established linkages with academic institutions in Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Vietnam, Thailand, Republic of Georgia, Australia, Peru, Mexico, Ecuador, Chile, Brazil, and Argentina.

Visit Our Website

www.depts.washington.edu/mirt

Photo Quiz



Born in New York on July 24, 1920, she predated women's right to vote by one month. She was educated in Bronx and studied law at Columbia University Law School (Harvard, her first choice, turned her down-its law school did not accept women until 1952.) A fighter for justice and peace, equal rights, human dignity, environmental integrity, and sustainable development, she has advanced human goals and political alliances worldwide.

Known by her colleagues as a "passionate perfectionist", she wrote the first law banning discrimination against women in obtaining credit, credit cards, loans, and mortgages, and introduced pioneering bills on comprehensive child care, Social Security for homemakers, family planning, and abortion rights. In 1975, she introduced an amendment to the Civil Rights Act to include gay and lesbian rights.

She was the first Jewish Congresswoman and was known for her wide-brimmed hats. Describing her reason once said, "I began wearing hats as a young lawyer because it helped me to establish my professional identity. Before that, whenever I was at a meeting, someone would ask me to get coffee."

Who is this remarkable woman?

A special prize will be awarded to the first person providing the correct response. Send your response to mirt@u.washington.edu. ** Cheers!**