Meet the 2015 Harvard MIRT Fellows

The Harvard MIRT Program faculty and staff hosted a two day pre-travel orientation program on May 7 and 8 at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health campus to welcome the 2015 fellows.
Meet the 2015 MIRT Fellows!

It is with great pleasure that we introduce our Harvard MIRT (MHIRT) 2015 fellows to the MIRT Program community. The new cohort of fellows come from eleven universities around the country. Hope you’ll enjoy meeting them!

Diana’s Personal Statement

Hello! My name is Diana Chaves and I am currently a junior at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts. I am pursuing a Sociology major and a concentration in Women and Gender Studies. During my college career I have become very passionate in viewing today’s health disparities through a Sociological perspective, and critically analyzing the connection between sociology and medicine. Aiming to pursue a career in Public Health, I am honored to be taking part in the MIRT program this summer. Through this experience I am looking forward towards learning about global health research and becoming equipped with the skills I need to alleviate some of today’s health and social inequities. My main aspiration in life is to be able to help in underdeveloped countries and make a difference in the lives of those in need. Eventually, I want to obtain my Masters in Public Health and work at a nonprofit organization that focuses on sexual justice and women’s rights. I am very excited about my immersion into the Peruvian culture this summer. While I was born in Bogota, Colombia I have never traveled to another part of South America, and cannot wait to obtain a new perspective on health issues and overall the world. In my free time I enjoy trying new restaurants, playing soccer, doing Birkham yoga, and volunteering at various sites in Worcester.

“Knowledge and understanding reconcile. They point a way forward, restore a sense of agency that challenges the terror of helplessness. They allow time and space for complexity, for subtlety.” -President Drew Faust, Harvard Commencement 2015
Anne’s Personal Statement

Hey there! My name is Anne Wells and I am from Houston, Texas. I will be going into my senior year in Fall 2015 at Rice University majoring in Latin American Studies with a focus on indigenous transculturation in medicine, and I am also pre-med. I plan on going to medical school and specializing in Infectious Disease (because germs are so cool!). A dream of mine is to be a medical researcher in Third/Developing world nations some day with an emphasis on preventative care and intercultural medicine. Following my passions for Andean culture, I have already had the tremendous opportunity of volunteering on a community archaeology project on a Loewenstern Fellowship in Sacred Valley, Peru during the summer of 2014 and studying primary healthcare access in the indigenous population of Chile during the fall of 2014. I am so incredibly excited to be returning to Peru this summer through the MIRT program to get new perspectives on a country I have already fallen in love with. I expect to not only learn a considerable amount of new research technique but also how cultural habits have direct implications on measurable outcomes in epidemiology.

Omar’s Personal Statement

Hi! My name is Omar Pineda Jr., born and raised in the Bronx, NY and a rising senior at Amherst College. I’m double majoring in Mathematics and Asian Languages & Civilizations, but remnants of my pre-med interests somehow led me to discover opportunities in public health. For whenever I find myself with spare time, I also enjoy biking, photography, and language learning. Last summer, I was exposed to Biostatistics research and I hope to expand on this by venturing into other interdisciplinary parts of the field. I’ve spent the past 6 months studying in Kyoto, Japan and am looking forward to the continuation of global immersion that awaits in Peru. Coincidentally, the anthropology research that I’ve been working on here has dealt with Peruvian nikkeijin immigrants, so this serves as an opportunity to in some ways "come full circle". I hope that my summer with MIRT will help me consolidate my interests and develop a deeper relationship with public health in its capacity to enact both economic and cultural change. A research opportunity that simultaneously exposes me to other cultures, especially those far removed from mine, appeals to me all the more. I’m excited for all that this experience has to offer and the adventures to come!
Samantha Avila
Undergraduate, Williams College
MIRT Site: Chile

Hello! My name is Samantha Avila. I am a junior at Williams College, pursuing a double major in Chemistry and French. I am a first-generational college student from Chapel Hill, North Carolina and am studying in Paris this semester to develop my interests in French, science, and public health. From the effects of the attacks at Charlie Hebdo to conversations with students on laïcité (a term often described to represent the complete separation of church and state in government) and health care in France, my experience abroad contributes to a broad perspective of how one’s society influences public health and values the importance of mental health services. This summer, I am eager to apply my fluency in Spanish to my research and curiosity of how culture may affect mental public health in Chile. Upon returning to Williams, I look forward to running on the cross-country team, continuing biochemistry research, and volunteering at the nursing home located near my college. Following my studies, I will be taking a gap year to further confirm my intent in a career in public health and medicine.

May’s Personal Statement

Hi! My name is Ngan (May) Do. I am a junior majoring in Biology and minoring in Spanish and Anthropology. I was born and raised in a small rural town in Vietnam until the age of ten. It was in this town where I first learned and personally experienced the negative consequences of health disparities through the loss of a family member. Last spring break, I had the opportunity to participate in a service trip that served the Native American community in Sisseton, SD. During this trip, I learned about the limited healthcare access in their community as well as their own perspective and understanding of illnesses. This experience further strengthened my interest for health inequalities and piqued my interest for the cultural aspect of public health and medicine. I am thrilled and honored to spend the summer carrying out a public health research project in Chile as an MIRT fellow. This authentic international research experience will prepare me for success as I pursue a career in medicine and public health.

Ngan (May) Do
Undergraduate, University of Missouri
MIRT Site: Chile

Samantha’s Personal Statement

Hello! My name is Samantha Avila. I am a junior at Williams College, pursuing a double major in Chemistry and French. I am a first-generational college student from Chapel Hill, North Carolina and am studying in Paris this semester to develop my interests in French, science, and public health. From the effects of the attacks at Charlie Hebdo to conversations with students on laïcité (a term often described to represent the complete separation of church and state in government) and health care in France, my experience abroad contributes to a broad perspective of how one’s society influences public health and values the importance of mental health services. This summer, I am eager to apply my fluency in Spanish to my research and curiosity of how culture may affect mental public health in Chile. Upon returning to Williams, I look forward to running on the cross-country team, continuing biochemistry research, and volunteering at the nursing home located near my college. Following my studies, I will be taking a gap year to further confirm my intent in a career in public health and medicine.
Hello! My name is Beemnet Neway and I am a junior at Georgetown University, studying Human Science while completing the pre-medical track. Growing up in a heavily immigrant community, I was conscious of the inequalities in healthcare. During my freshman year of college, I joined a student group called the Minority Health Initiative Council, where I began to understand the causes of health disparities and ways to combat them. This past summer and fall semesters I was able to combine my interests in health disparities and research by working on a community based intervention project working with a low-income Latina population here in the DC area. Now as a Harvard MIRT fellow, I am extremely excited and honored to engage in research in the context of a new culture that will allow me to embark on my journey as a future global healthcare worker.

When I am not working on my career goals, I love to sing and play music. I am a part of the Georgetown University Gospel Choir and I play the violin, guitar, and drums for my church’s worship band. I am also an avid photographer and I can’t wait to capture some of the beautiful landscape in New Zealand this summer!

Greetings. My name is Wayne Lawrence and I am a Master of Public Health student studying Epidemiology at Georgia Southern University Jiann-Ping Hsu College of Public Health. Through research and academic training, I developed a sincere passion for eliminating health inequities through deeper knowledge and research on social determinants of health, and advocacy for equitable health resources for the underserved and underrepresented population. As a graduate student, I have had the opportunity to work within medically underserved populations within the United States and abroad by addressing health disparities and improving access to adequate health care.

I am excited for the opportunity to do research abroad as a MIRT Fellow in New Zealand. The program will provide me with the experience to take what I have learned in the classroom and apply it to real world situations. As I transition into my Doctor of Public Health program this fall, I am confident that the experiences I will gain from the MIRT program will help me grow not only as a researcher but as a public health professional. I cannot wait to begin my journey!

"Do what you can, with what you have, where you are." -Theodore Roosevelt
Hello! My name is Gifty Addae. I am a Biochemistry and Anthropology double major at the University of Massachusetts Boston. I enjoy photography, art, travelling, cooking, hiking, music, and chronicling my thoughts through writing. I also enjoy conducting biochemical research. Although I have experience in bench work, I am eager to undertake a project in public health. I am incredibly passionate about healthcare reform and universal access to healthcare for all. Sadly, universal access to healthcare is a fundamental right that only a few are privileged to have. Global health is of particular interest to me because the need for healthcare is universal. I am deeply humbled and very excited to begin my journey as a 2015 MIRT Fellow.

My time in Australia and New Zealand promises to deliver an unparalleled learning experience in global health. I am looking forward to learning from, while contributing to a population-based research project. I also hope to nurture my love for research, while enhancing my statistical and analytical skills. I cannot wait to embrace the rich cultures and gain a true understanding of the healthcare climate in both countries. There is a whole new continent to be explored, new friends to be made, and new experiences to be had, and I for one cannot wait to begin! This program promises to be an unforgettable cultural experience which will likely shape me as I continue my quest to have an impact on global health.

My name is Idris Ayantoye. I am an undergraduate at Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT). I major in Molecular Biochemistry and Biophysics. I was born in Lagos, Nigeria and moved to the U.S to pursue higher education. As a child, I took much delight in my struggle to pronounce and memorize the chemical names of my cough syrup and anti-malaria drugs. My childhood curiosity with those strange words somehow propelled me towards my academic major. Once I complete my undergrad studies, I plan to apply to medical school to train as a physician-scientist.

I am excited about my participation in the MIRT and I am eager to visit Ethiopia to experience its beautiful and diverse cultures. I enjoyed playing soccer, basketball, and Ping-Pong. I also enjoy reading biographies. My favorite is ‘American Prometheus: The Triumph and Trial of J. Robert Oppenheimer’ by Kai Bird and Martin Sherwin.
I am Joseph Okeiga, a junior at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte studying Public Health with a minor in Health Communication. After attaining my undergraduate degree, I aspire to attend graduate school in my preparation to become a health administrator. I have a deep interested in international health and would like to establish a non-profit organization that focuses on improving the health of developing countries. I am a very outgoing person and enjoy meeting new people. I enjoy playing soccer, cooking, watching movies, and traveling.

I am extremely honored and excited to have the opportunity to spend the summer in Ethiopia as a Harvard MIRT Fellow. This experience will give me valuable insight on how I can improve the lives of communities in developing countries. I am eager in learning how to conduct population-based research in hopes of developing practical skills in the field of public health. I can’t forget about the delicious food and beautiful culture I am about to experience in Ethiopia. When it’s all said and done, I hope to become a more competent public health student with tons of memories and new friendships after this summer.

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Ijala Wilson
Undergraduate, SUNY Albany
MIRT Site: Ethiopia

Hello everyone! My name is Ijala Wilson. I am a rising senior, currently attending SUNY Albany. I am a Human Biology major and Public Health minor. I have always had an interest in science and helping people. These interests influenced my goals of pursuing a career in medicine and public health. I hope to one day achieve a MD/MPH degree. In pursuing a career in medicine/public health, I want to help people on a large scale. I value giving back to the community and mentorship. I hope to be a great service to not only the underserved people in my community; but a great service to the world. As a person who grew up in an underprivileged community, I want to give the younger generation a positive role model to look up to. As a future health professional, I want to help the overall health of humans and improve health disparities globally.

I am exceedingly honored and grateful to be given the opportunity of being a MIRT Fellow conducting population based research in Ethiopia this coming summer! Participating in this program will be a life changing experience for me. I know that I will learn so much about the rich Ethiopian culture and history, as well as the current health disparities that the country faces today. Through the MIRT program, I hope to enhance my knowledge of the fields of research and global health, to broaden my perspective of the world and also be able to better determine which specific field of study in medicine/public health I plan to pursue. I am eager to take part in the Harvard MIRT program in Ethiopia this summer!

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Joseph’s Personal Statement

I am Joseph Okeiga, a junior at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte studying Public Health with a minor in Health Communication. After attaining my undergraduate degree, I aspire to attend graduate school in my preparation to become a health administrator. I have a deep interested in international health and would like to establish a non-profit organization that focuses on improving the health of developing countries. I am a very outgoing person and enjoy meeting new people. I enjoy playing soccer, cooking, watching movies, and traveling.

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MIRT 2015 Pre-Travel Orientation

A two day pre-travel orientation program was held on May 7 and 8 at the Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health campus. This annual pre-travel orientation welcomes the new 2015 MIRT fellows and prepare them for their fellowship experience. The orientation provides opportunities to meet fellow MIRT students and program faculty, get important information on travel health, ethical conduct of human research, travel safety, and cultural competency while gaining hands on skills necessary for conducting their own epidemiologic research. **Thank you so much** to all who participated in making orientation a success!

Stanley Estime and Alyssa Speier, QA/QI Education Specialists at Harvard Office of Human Research Administration provided fellows with a lecture and led case study discussions on ethical conduct of human subjects research.

Dr. Michelle A. Williams, Professor and Chair of Department of Epidemiology shared the two-decade history of the MIRT Program. Karlotta Rosebaugh, MIRT Program Advisory Board Member and former Director of Health Sciences Minority Students at University of Washington provided a lecture on Cultural Competency.

Donald Halstead, Instructor and Director of Writing Program at the Harvard Chan School shared his expertise on scientific writing.

Dr. Edward Ryan, Professor at Harvard Medical School and Director of Tropical Medicine, Division of Infection Disease at Mass General Hospital shared his expertise on travel health.

Dr Annette Fitzpatrick (left), Professor in the Departments of Epidemiology and Family Medicine and Global Health at the University of Washington taught fellows introduction to Epidemiology and Biostatistics. Alyssa Fontana (right), International Safety and Security Specialist at Harvard Global Support Services shared her expertise on travel safety.

**Thank You!**
Every year our MIRT fellows and faculty work on diverse research projects to 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 studies from MIRT 2014. Please visit the MIRT Program website to read the complete list of abstracts.

Commentary

Should the governments of ‘developed’ countries be held responsible for equalizing the indigenous health gap?

Parirash Abdolhosseini1, Chantel Bonner1, Alexandra Montano1, Yves-Yvette Young1, Daniel Wadsworth2, Michelle Williams1 and Lee Stoner3

Abstract: Across the globe there is significant variation between and within indigenous populations in terms of world view, culture, and socio-political forces. However, many indigenous groups do share a striking commonality: greater rates of non-communicable diseases and shorter life expectancies than non-indigenous compatriots. Notably, this health gap persists for ‘developed’ countries, including Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States. The question of who is responsible for equalizing the gap is complicated. Using Australia as an exemplar context, this commentary will present arguments ‘for’ and ‘against’ the governments of developed nations being held liable for closing the indigenous health gap. We will discuss the history and nature of the health gap, actions needed to ‘close the gap’, and which party has the necessary resources to do so.

Background: Although in the past decade occidental countries have increasingly recognized the personal and societal burden of migraine, it remains poorly understood in Africa. No study has evaluated the impact of sleep disturbances and the quality of life (QOL) in sub-Saharan Africans with migraine. Methods: This was a cross-sectional study evaluating adults, ≥ 18 years of age, attending outpatient clinics in Ethiopia. Standardized questionnaires were utilized to collect demographic, headache, sleep, lifestyle, and QOL characteristics in all participants. Migraine classification was based on International Classification of Headache Disorders (ICHD)-II criteria. The Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index (PSQI) and the World Health Organization Quality of Life (WHOQOL-BREF) questionnaires were utilized to assess sleep quality and QOL characteristics, respectively. Multivariable logistic regression models were fit to estimate adjusted odds ratio (OR) and 95% confidence intervals (95% CI). Results: Of 1,060 participants, 145 (14%) met ICHD-II criteria for migraine. Approximately three-fifth of the study participants (60.5%) were found to have poor sleep quality. After adjustments, migraineurs had over a two-fold increased odds (OR = 2.24, 95% CI 1.49-3.38) of overall poor sleep quality (PSQI global score >5) as compared with non-migraineurs. Compared with non-migraineurs, migraineurs were also more likely to experience short sleep duration (≤7 hours) (OR = 2.07, 95% CI 1.43-3.00), long sleep latency (≥30 min) (OR = 1.97, 95% CI 1.36-2.85), daytime dysfunction due to sleepiness (OR = 1.51, 95% CI 1.12-2.02), and poor sleep efficiency (<85%) (OR = 1.93, 95% CI 1.31-2.88). Similar to occidental countries, Ethiopian migraineurs reported a reduced QOL as compared to non-migraineurs. Specifically Ethiopian migraineurs were more likely to experience poor physical (OR = 1.56, 95% CI 1.08-2.25) and psychological health (OR = 1.75, 95% CI 1.20-2.56), as well as poor social relationships (OR = 1.56, 95% CI 1.08-2.25), and living environments (OR = 1.41, 95% CI 0.97-2.05) as compared to those without migraine. Conclusion: Similar to occidental countries, migraine is highly prevalent among Ethiopians and is associated with poor sleep quality and a lower QOL. These findings support the need for physicians and policy makers to take action to improve the quality of headache care and access to treatment in Ethiopia.
MIRT Alumni Spotlight: Dale Terasaki, MD, MPH

Dale Terasaki was an undergraduate student at the University of Washington (UW) when he participated in the MIRT Program Ethiopia site. During his fellowship he worked with Drs. Berhane, Williams and Gelaye on a project titled “Anger expression, violent behavior, and symptoms of depression among male college student in Ethiopia” (BMC Public Health 2009).

Since the MIRT program in Ethiopia, Dale began medical studies at UW, where he completed his first year at a rural training site. After his third year of medical school, Dale expanded his curriculum to complete a Masters in Public Health at UW. His thesis was titled “Physical activity, length of residence and vehicle ownership among U.S. immigrants: an analysis of the 2003 new immigrant survey.” The following year he spent time in central Mexico to learn Spanish, but this was cut short by a health emergency that required heart surgery. Nevertheless, Dale re-entered his last year of medical school and has begun residency in internal medicine-primary care at the University of Colorado in Denver. We are proud of you Dr. Terasaki!

MIRT 2014 Fellows at the New England Science Symposium

Harvard MIRT alumni presented their MIRT research findings at the April 2015 New England Science Symposium at Harvard Medical School in Boston, MA.

Alumni Updates

Do you have an update?

We want to highlight your professional accomplishments and personal milestones.

Help us keep you informed and let us know how you’re doing!

Please contact Lauren Friedman via email (hsphmirt@gmail.com).

We would love to hear from you!
The MIRT program faculty are excited to welcome our new MIRT program coordinator. Lauren is a graduate of Boston University with a PhD in cell and molecular biology and five years of teaching experience. Her research interests are in molecular, behavioral, and physiological responses to environmental stressors. She conducted my PhD research using an organismal and transcriptomic approach to identify intraspecific variation in oxidative stress response.

“Building upon my prior experience, I am looking forward to integrating my knowledge in biology into public health research. As the program coordinator for the Multidisciplinary International Research Training (MIRT/MHIRT) Program, I have the opportunity to be involved in collaborative research and training activities with our faculty, student fellows, and international research partners.”

Lauren E. Friedman, PhD
MIRT Program Coordinator

Dr. Michelle A. Williams received a mentoring award at the 2015 Commencement Eve Awards Celebration. Each year, mentoring awards are presented to faculty at the Chan School of Public Health based on student nominations. She received the award from our own Alvin Tran (MIRT fellow 2010). Alvin is currently a second year doctoral candidate in the ScD Nutrition Program at the Harvard Chan School and the outgoing President of the Harvard Chan Student Government. Congratulations Dr. Williams!
Striving to Eliminate Health Disparities

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MIRT/MHIRT 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 Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD). The Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health MIRT (formerly the University of Washington MIRT) Program was 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, Vietnam, Thailand, Republic of Georgia, Peru, New Zealand, Mexico, Malaysia, Ethiopia, Chile and Australia.

Please visit our website! www.hsphmirt.com
and connect with us on LinkedIn!

Dr. Annette Fitzpatrick, Professor in the Departments of Epidemiology and Family Medicine and Global Health at the University of Washington, presented a well attended seminar at Harvard on her collaborative research in Nepal entitled "Non-communicable diseases in developing countries: can observational research make a difference?"