THE CRIMSON CHRONICLE

HARVARD T.H. CHAN SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH Postdoctoral Association

From Postdocs and Research Associates at HSPH
From the Editor’s desk

Dear Colleagues,

We are thrilled to share with you this spring issue of the PDA newsletter; the Crimson Chronicle.

In this issue, the emphasis is on ‘Diversity’ at its broadest and-hopefully- most inclusive definitions, depicted through the cover and the contributions presented.

I had a great pleasure to meet with Professor Meredith Rosenthal, the Senior Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Boyden Gray Professor of Health Economics and Policy. We talked about many things from her academic journey, to how she spends her day and how we see diversity. I hope that you will enjoy reading as much I enjoyed the interview with her in-person.

I also had the opportunity to meet with Fred Tabung, an outstanding research associate and former Yerby fellow-and most recently appointed assistant professor at Ohio State University- (many congrats, Fred) who shares with us many useful tips and inspiring stories about his journey at HSPH. I hope you will find our discussion useful and informative.

From the council, we share the news, that after two highly productive years of service in the council as VP for advocacy, Aisha decided to step down from her role in the council and most recently has been elected as the Chair of the Dean’s Advisory Committee on Diversity and Inclusion (DACDI).

In this issue, Aisha shares with us a perspective on supporting diversity among postdocs and an article on DACDI’s role and goals; Tia shares the successful experience of the spring nanocourses; Robyn and Susan introduce the buddy system; Lucas announces the travel and Kocaeli awards winners and Scott, shares key remarks as the PDA president.

Many thanks to all who contributed to this issue and we look forward to further contributions, feedback and suggestions for the upcoming summer issue!

Happy Spring Everyone!

Reem Waziry
Editor-in-Chief
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Remarks from the PDA President

Dear members and friends of the Harvard Chan Postdoctoral Association,

Jacqueline Cohen, the previous PDA President, stepped down this winter to take on a new career opportunity in Norway. (I'm envious. Think of the smoked fish!) I had the privilege to move from my previous role as VP Communications to become the current President. 2018 is the start of the PDA's 10th year, and it's off to a fun start.

We're grateful to the 145 postdocs and RAs who responded to the PDA Survey this past winter. This was an incredible number of responses. The results have helped the Council get a stronger grasp on what all our hopes and needs are. In the survey, three big themes emerged: money, grants, and jobs.

The Council continues to advocate for liveable salaries and benefits and to bring postdocs and RAs opportunities for professional development through workshops, Nanocourses, and travel awards. As we move into our 10th year, I'm hoping that the PDA can form stronger relationships with School to ensure that postdocs and RAs are being thoughtfully and strategically supported in each of these areas.

To do the best we can, we need your help! All PDA Council meetings are open. If you're a postdoc or RA, you're a voting member of the PDA. If you like being a postdoc at the Harvard Chan School, or you want to help make it better, please do get involved! (Seriously, I want you to).

And remember, science is a social endeavor, and the thing that brings us all together, so do take advantage of PDA social and academic events like Poster Day!

With best wishes and high hopes, I am your faithful servant (and PDA President),

Scott Olesen
PDA president
olesen@hsph.harvard.edu
The PDA Council has invited Professor Meredith Rosenthal to an informal chat and here goes all we have talked about!

Tell us more about your background and your journey in academia.

I studied international relation and economics as undergraduate -- I always found great interest in studying economics but focused on solving problems. I spent a couple of years working in consulting in tax policy and economics; I really enjoyed the technical parts of the work, but it did not seem like the problem I wanted to solve. I was always interested in women’s health and economics, which led me to ‘health economics’ and then I joined Harvard as PhD student in health economics and I have never left.

How did you decide that you want to pursue a career in academia?

I think I certainly didn’t know that this was what I wanted to do right at the beginning or what an academic career is like at this early stage. It mainly started by watching the faculty and the academics I work with. It became very clear to me that health economics is a field where I could have a lot of autonomy and that was important to me. I could choose the problems I wanted to work on.

My second job out of college was in a research firm, that does a very similar kind of research, but in a firm, you are an employee and even though you have some autonomy it was more limited. I felt that in an academic setting, I could follow my passion in terms of the problems I wanted to work on.

At Harvard, there are many opportunities to get involved with policy, In addition to autonomy there is also variety and you could achieve impact. Autonomy is on the top of my list.

What motivates you the most in your work and research pursuits?

My interest in the outcomes of health policy motivates me. My work is domestic and motivated by the mission of affordable health care for the American people and to have an impact. Further, working with my students motivates me, and advising students and mentees in general is always a source of motivation. I love working with students.
Describe your ideal academic work environment

Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health have been a wonderful work environment for me, we are very lucky to work here and I am proud that this is my 20th anniversary at the Department of Health Policy and Management. People are driven by seeking solutions and incredibly collegial.

Have you ever had a great idea or goal but faced many challenges to implement it? How did you deal with those challenges?

A lot of times the work that we can do is not quite as grand as what we want to do. Overtime, I learnt that an incremental approach works better. For example, one topic I am interested in, is how competition in health care systems affect providers to provide better health care and to adopt innovations. To assess that, we need to have national data to look at what providers are doing in terms of innovation and also address the competitive environment and address the change overtime. We could start for example with a national survey of health system to characterize this and generate a hypothesis.

Sometimes the big ideas are not possible to pursue right away, but there are many ways to gradually build a research platform and then with incremental findings, it is easier to reach out to key funders and present what we found and what we want to do next. We have to approach problems creatively and provide incremental data through incremental funding.

Faced with many competing demands on your time, how do you determine your priorities?

Priorities are important, it’s crucial to have a healthy work-life balance too. During the day, I prioritize meeting with my students, also the students and mentees I work with, on projects related to diversity and inclusion. My day at work is mostly spent like that. I sneak a bit of research work around meetings and during the weekends.

My top priorities have to do with issues related to diversity and inclusion and issues in our community at large.

What types of resources would a young investigator need to successfully establish their research agenda?

It is always a matter of supply and demand. On the supply side, mentorship is critically important; no one succeeds on their own. The best mentors keep an eye on the mentee professional development and give keys to new areas.

On the demand side, figuring out what your core area is and stay focused. Also, remember to keep it simple and work on what’s important to you.

How do you see academic diversity?

I see academic diversity in the broadest possible way. Including all dimensions and intersections, it’s really very important in the work we do to maintain the international diversity in faculty, staff, students and trainees. It’s also very important to acknowledge historical roots of oppression in the US and maintain diversity in terms of underrepresented minority racial and ethnic groups.

To me it is important to see all of it and to embody the value of equity through all ranks and levels at the school.
The Dean’s Advisory Committee on Diversity and Inclusion (DACDI) was started in 2013 to discuss topics related to diversity and inclusion and propose strategies and solutions for improving recruitment and retention, as well as relationships with under-represented and/or underserved groups at the school and in the surrounding community.

Since its inception, the committee has evolved to include representatives from all constituencies at HSPH, including students, alumni, staff, and academic appointees. Postdoc representatives include Christian Suharlim, Former PDA President, Scott Olesen, Current PDA President, and myself, Aisha Dickerson.

I originally joined DACDI as the PDA representative through my position as VP for Advocacy, and was elected to serve as the Chair of this committee last year.

Since then, I have worked with the members of DACDI to develop recommendations to submit to the Dean with the intention of improving equity, diversity, and inclusion at HSPH. Current topics of focus are as follows:

1) Recruitment of Diverse Faculty and Academic Appointees:

To improve recruitment, retention, and promotion of diverse faculty and academic appointees (i.e. research scientists, research associates, and postdoctoral fellows), DACDI is developing a plan for the formation of a Diversity Leadership Council, following the model of several institutions that have demonstrated success in this area.

The committee also recognizes the importance of hiring full-time staff with the primary purpose of finding and recruiting diverse applicants for faculty and academic appointee positions as well as providing adequate funding for these positions.
2) Improving Diversity Education:

DACDI believes in the importance of training all members of the HSPH community. Thus, we are working with the Office of Diversity and Inclusion to provide better access to training opportunities by incorporating them into regular meetings for faculty and staff.

We are also working with the Office of Education to incorporate diversity and inclusion policies and important resources into every syllabus.

3) Doctoral Students Retention:

In an effort to better understand the factors that influence matriculation and graduation for all HSPH students, DACDI will work with the Office of Student Affairs to evaluate existing student services and create new programs to identify and assist students with needs, including mental health, food insecurity, and bias.

We are also developing methods to ensure students have multiple mentors during their degree programs along with a clear plan of expectations on timelines for graduation and career development.

Although I have recently stepped down from my position as VP of Advocacy for the PDA, I will continue to work with the school administration to improve diversity and inclusion efforts for all of the Chan School.

I openly welcome ideas, and invite you to contact me at DACDI@hsph.harvard.edu with your questions and suggestions.

You can also visit the DACDI webpage to learn more about it (https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/dacdi/)

Aisha Dickerson
Dean’s Advisory Committee for Diversity and Inclusion, Chair
adickerson@hsph.harvard.edu
An interview with Fred Tabung, a former Yerby fellow and recently appointed Assistant Professor at the College of Medicine at Ohio State University (effective July 9th 2018)

How did you come to join HSPH as a postdoc?

I am originally from Cameroon in Central Africa. I came to HSPH as a Yerby fellow, after completing my graduate education at the University of South Carolina, where I completed my masters and PhD. My work has focused mainly on investigating the role of dietary patterns in relation to cancer. In the last year of my doctoral training, I started looking for postdoctoral positions. I applied directly to Harvard and other institutions and settled on Harvard because I admired my current mentor’s work and realized he was the author I cited the most in my PhD work. I applied and joined HSPH through the Yerby fellowship.

What is one thing you liked the most about pursuing a postdoctoral training through the Yerby fellowship?

The Yerby fellowship gave me the flexibility to pursue my own research objectives. I was very lucky in that regard, but I did not know that prior to coming. The Yerby program is also very structured and includes many opportunities for networking and career development.

What were the main goals you wanted to achieve during your Yerby fellowship?

One of my objectives was to obtain my own funding, especially a K award. When I started I did not know what K mechanism I want to apply to, but I knew that I wanted a K to continue this level of independence that the Yerby fellowship gave me.

As opposed to pursuing grant applications, there is a high degree of certainty in publishing research papers. I applied for four grants in my postdoc, out of the four, only one got accepted, so these didn’t add to my CV but took a lot of my time as a postdoc. However, this helped me have a complete and well thought out application by the time I applied for my K award (K99/R00 – Pathway to Independence Award).
What other resources you found particularly useful as a postdoctoral trainee at HSPH?

Harvard catalyst courses have been of immense benefit. One of the courses I found very useful was on the mentor-mentee relationship; I have been lucky to have great mentors but this training was particularly useful in seeing what I could do better as a mentee. Following that training, I started to be more proactive as a mentee, it’s important to set deadlines for yourself; ask for meetings with your mentor when you need them, and manage the meeting agenda.

Tell us about one main research project you completed as a postdoctoral fellow at HSPH.

The main project of my postdoctoral training, just got published in JAMA Oncology. It is really amazing and rewarding to see also the reaction of the JAMA readers and scientific community on the work presented. This project examined the association of dietary inflammatory potential with colorectal cancer risk using a dietary inflammatory index score that I previously developed. We found that intake of proinflammatory diets was associated with a significantly higher risk of developing colorectal cancer in both men and women.

What is its Almetric score?

It’s 435 (from Jan 11, 2018 to April 24, 2018)!

The article has gathered considerable media attention and has accumulated an Almetric score of 435 since its publication on January 11, 2018; including 31,270 views.

What is one of your main challenges as a junior academic?

One of my biggest challenges now, is ‘time’. It has become more and more difficult to find time to attend courses and learn new things. One approach I follow is to assign ‘blocks of time’ dedicated to specific tasks.

What is one main element for success as a junior academic?

Try to be as strategic as you can, try and always look a couple of years down the road to determine where you want to be and what it takes to get there then start putting together what it takes. Continue to develop networks. Networks are crucial.

What do you do outside of work?

I watch a lot of soccer, and I currently coach my 12-year old son and his recreational soccer team. I like to watch movies too.
Supporting Postdoc Diversity

In 2015, underrepresented minorities, both domestic and international, constituted only 10.8% of research-based academic appointees (i.e. postdocs, research associates, and research scientists). With the appointment of Dr. Michelle Williams as Dean of HSPH in 2016, news articles proudly touted “first Black Harvard faculty dean” and “…first woman to lead the school”. Dr. Williams’s appointment is well-deserved and notably progressive, but it does not minimize the ongoing lack of diversity at the school.

The hopes in 2016 were that Williams’s appointment would draw a more diverse applicant pool to the Chan school, but the reality is that more resources will be needed to improve diversity at HSPH. The most successful diversity programs are those that designate a significant amount of money to their efforts, and although there are various programs specifically designed to increase diversity in the school, the signature diversity program for postdoctoral fellows is the Yerby Postdoctoral Fellowship.

As a brief background, Dr. Alonzo Smythe Yerby was an African-American public health innovator who studied at HSPH and later returned as head of the Department of Health Services Administration at the in 1966, where he remained for 16 years. At the time he was the only Black tenured faculty at the school. The purpose of the fellowship is to “contribute to the diversity of HSPH by supporting postdocs from groups historically underrepresented in U.S. health-related sciences”. Previous Yerby fellows have successfully transitioned into positions at various prestigious institutions, including HSPH. (for more information visit HSPH website).

To increase the success of new appointees, the program was revamped to fund 100% effort for Yerby fellows (in contrast to the current 50%). Unfortunately, this increase restricts funds for the program and has subsequently reduced the number of potential new fellows from five to three fellows each term. In order to maintain the current rate of five new fellows, and continue to increase diversity of postdocs at the school, the Dean’s Advisory Committee for Diversity and Inclusion (DACDI) is recommending that HSPH administration provide the additional funds for these positions.

Although the school has vehemently declared a goal of improving diversity, it is now time that they let their actions reflect that by increasing funding for this diversity effort. Yerby Fellowship application acceptance will start September 2018.

“I am hoping that diversity is not just another hot-topic, but is actually a cause that the school stands behind.”

Aisha Dickerson
VP for Advocacy
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Introducing the PDA Buddy Initiative

Moving between institutions is difficult; moving between countries is even worse. Thinking back on what would have been helpful for us when we were coming to Harvard and transitioning to life in Boston, we came up with the Buddy Initiative.

The aim of this initiative is to pair existing post-docs/research associates with incoming post-docs/research associates from the same geographical region, so that the latter have a friendly point of contact outside the administration whom they can pose questions to and ask for advice relevant to their situation.

At the moment, we are recruiting existing international post-docs and research associates who are willing to be buddies. Should this program be a success, we will expand to post-docs from different regions of the US.

Once we have established a database of potential buddies, the Office of Faculty Affairs will begin notifying all incoming post-docs/research associates of the initiative and direct them to contact us at the PDA. We will then check the availability of buddies from the same region; if you are one of these, we will contact you again to confirm your participation and then connect you with your buddy!

Participation in this program is entirely voluntary. We encourage all international postdocs and research associates to consider joining, especially if you once hoped you had someone to ask for advice!

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to email us at newpostdoc@hsph.harvard.edu.

Further details on this initiative can be found at https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/pda/information-for-fellows/ and if you are interested in signing up now, please go to https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Z9KC3PN.

Robyn Lee and Susan Peters
International and Recruitment Chairs
Post-Doctoral Association Council
Spring Nanocourses

Physical inactivity is estimated to cause as many deaths globally each year as smoking.[1] The first Nanocourse of 2018, featured public health surveillance efforts and behavior change approaches to increasing physical activity across the life course. Under the mentorship of Dr. I-Min Lee, Drs. Masamitsu Kamada, Rachel A. Millstein, and Angie Cradock highlighted key components of physical activity epidemiology, physical activity measurement, study design, and relationships between physical activity and specific health and disease states.

During the first session, Drs. Kamada and Millstein covered an introduction to physical activity, including rates of physical activity worldwide, the use of wearable technology and robust study designs, health benefits and risks associated with physical activity, and interventions for increasing physical activity—specifically emphasizing key determinants related to physical inactivity behavior change.

Between sessions, each participant tracked their physical activity using methods such as wearable activity trackers, phones, and pedometers. First, second, and third place prizes were awarded to the nanocourse participants who logged the top three physical activity hours.

In addition to individual level motivations towards being physically active, microscale factors may also influence physical activity.

Microscale factors within the built environment include streets, sidewalks, intersections, and design characteristics as well as characteristics of the social environment (e.g., stray dogs, graffiti, trash).

During the second session, participants used the Microscale Audit of Pedestrian Streetscapes (MAPS) tool to collect audit data on the pedestrian environment and walkability in the Longwood Medical area. Using these data, participants worked in small groups to conduct analyses and interpret their results, while thinking through the implications of their findings on developing social interventions to promote physical activity.

The Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health is looking for nanocourse instructors. The next Nanocouse Information Session will be held on May 7th at 10:00 am, in the Epi library.

If you are interested in becoming a nanocourse instructor, please contact:

Tia McGill Rogers
Educational Initiatives Chair
tiamcgillrogers@hsph.harvard.edu

Reference:
Fall Travel Award Winners

Estela Shabani
"Characterization of a novel erythroid progenitor cell-line for the identification of host determinants of Plasmodium falciparum protein export and growth" at the American Society of Tropical Medicine Annual Meeting in New Orleans, LA.

Zhaozhong Zhu
"Shared Genetic Architecture between Asthma and Allergic Diseases: A Genome-Wide Cross Trait Analysis of 112,000 Individuals from UK Biobank" at the American Thoracic Society Conference in San Diego, CA.

Danilo Alvares da Silva
"A sequential approach to Bayesian joint modeling of longitudinal and survival data" at the Eastern North American Region International Biometric Society Spring Meeting in Atlanta, GA.

Trang VoPham
"Dioxin exposure and breast cancer risk in the Nurses' Health Study II" at the American Association of Geographers Conference Geospatial Health Research Symposium in New Orleans, LA.

Kocaeli Awards Winners

Aisha Dickerson
Epidemiology and Environmental Health

Tia McGill Rogers
Epidemiology

Maria Korre
Environmental Health
Useful Links

- 2017/2018 schedule of events
  https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/pda/20172018-schedule-of-events/

- Peer Grant Network
  https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/pda/peer-grant-network/

- Postdoc Workshops and Courses
  https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/faculty-affairs/postdoctoral-research-fellows/postdoc-workshops-and-courses/

- The Harvard University Policy on Sexual and Gender-Based Harassment
  http://titleix.harvard.edu/files/titleix/files/harvard_sexual_harassment_policy.pdf?m=1461104544