MEET THE 2016 HARVARD MIRT FELLOWS!

The Harvard MIRT Program faculty and staff hosted a two day pre-travel orientation program on May 5 and 6 at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health campus to welcome the 2016 fellows.

“I am extremely honored and excited to have been given the opportunity to do research with the Harvard MIRT program. I know that this will be a life changing experience, and I can’t wait to learn about the culture and take part in population based research... I hope to gain a broader global perspective and become a better STEM student!” - Nathan Muntz, Harvard MIRT 2016 New Zealand

“I know that this research fellowship opportunity will provide a substantial amount of personal, cultural, educational growth and development, while simultaneously addressing relevant health issues for Ethiopians through research.” - Bethannie Jamerson-Dowlen, Harvard MIRT 2016 Ethiopia

“Through the Harvard MIRT program I will be able to witness first hand the health disparities at a global level and learn how to become part of a solution.” - Stephanie Martinez, Harvard MIRT 2016 Peru
Meet the 2016 MIRT Fellows!

It is with great pleasure that we introduce our Harvard MIRT (MHIRT) 2016 fellows to the MIRT Program community. The new cohort of fellows come from eight universities around the country. We hope you’ll enjoy meeting them!

Sequoya Simon
Undergraduate, North Carolina Central University
MIRT Site: New Zealand

Sequoya’s Personal Statement

My name is Sequoya Simon. I am a junior at North Carolina Central University (NCCU), majoring in biology. Prior to attending NCCU, I served in the U.S. Army as an Environmental Health Specialist. Going forward, I would like to build from my foundation, and pursue a career in the developing field of epigenetics as a medical scientist. I am very excited about the opportunity to conduct public health research in New Zealand. Moreover, the Harvard MIRT program offers the possibility of in-depth exploration of environmental factors and its linkage to heritable disease development affecting minorities within our global community. In my free time, I like to visit local coffee shops and volunteer at our school’s garden, which provides organic herbs and vegetables to the underserved community of Durham. I thoroughly enjoy watching performance art, theater, and teaching restorative yoga classes.

Nathan Muntz
Undergraduate, Purdue University
MIRT Site: New Zealand

Nathan’s Personal Statement

Hello! My name is Nathan Muntz, and I am a sophomore at Purdue University. I am studying Health and Disease, with minors in History and Spanish. I have always had an interest in medicine, especially with my sister’s diagnosis of NF Type II. In the past couple of years, that interest has pointed me in the direction of medical school and surgery, and I am excited to see what my future holds! One of my other big interests is traveling. During the summer between 5th and 6th grade, I had the opportunity to travel to Italy and Greece on a historical culture trip for 3 weeks. Ever since then I’ve had the travel bug! I finally had the opportunity to travel out of the country again during my spring break this year. I traveled to Ecuador with Timmy Global Health for a week. In Ecuador, we set up 5 different clinics throughout the city of Quito and saw over 530 patients. My trip was truly life changing and solidified my desire to become a doctor and address global health disparities. I am extremely honored and excited to have been given the opportunity to do research with the Harvard MIRT program in New Zealand. I know that this will be a life changing experience, and I can’t wait to learn about the culture and take part in population based research. Through the MIRT program, I hope to gain a broader global perspective and become a better STEM student!
**Hannah’s Personal Statement**

My name is Hannah Mbony, and I am from Brookeville, Maryland. I am currently a sophomore biology major, and a chemistry minor following a pre-med track at Xavier University of Louisiana. I plan to continue my education after Xavier and pursue an M.D. or an M.D./PhD. My hope is that my time in New Zealand this summer will help me decide what path I want to take. I love to read, cook, sing, spend time with family and friends, and I love to travel and explore new places. I have had the opportunity to visit Cameroon, Italy, and London. While visiting Cameroon, the small country in West Africa where both my parents were born and raised, I started to become aware of the health disparities that exist around the world, especially in developing countries. My exposure to the health disparities in Cameroon has led me to want to explore similar issues in other parts of the world. My hopes are that one day I can help others who do not have the same access to health care that we have here in the United States. I am looking forward to travelling to New Zealand and immersing myself in their culture, as well as gaining valuable research experience.

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**Daniel’s Personal Statement**

My name is Daniel Nguyen. I am a junior at Xavier University of Louisiana and a psychology pre-medical major. I am extremely excited to have the opportunity to go to Ethiopia and do research. I would say that I am an adventurous person. I was kind of scared when I got matched to Ethiopia. However, I never backed down from an adventure so why should I start now. I see this as an opportunity to learn more about a different culture that I do not know much about and also to be engaged in international research. I expect to learn a lot from the Harvard MIRT program. However, I am also going to give my best to the Harvard MIRT program by learning as much as I can. I am looking forward to working with the faculty and my fellow colleagues in the Harvard MIRT program to develop my skills and to make me a person who can help create change.

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“The world is a book and those who do not travel read only one page.” - Augustine of Hippo
LaQueishia’s Personal Statement

Hi, my name is LaQueishia Cummins, and I am a junior majoring in Community Health at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. I have a passion for health equity, social justice, and learning about people from different cultures.

I grew up in Chicago, so I saw the public health issues that many big cities face. I also interned in the summer of 2015 in New York City, and I saw similar but different public health issues. I now know that there is a lot that determines whether or not people receive the healthcare they deserve. When I started majoring in Community Health, I knew I wanted to impact others in different communities.

From the Harvard MIRT fellowship, I hope to gain research training to prepare me for graduate studies and to help me pursue my goals of working in the health care field and doing public health research in the future. The research I will do will allow me to learn about topics in other populations and further strengthen my passion to help communities. I hope to one day open my own clinic in a low-income, inner city neighborhood that focuses on mental health and women’s health. This program will be a transformative and life-changing experience. I plan to immerse myself into the Ethiopian culture and learn a lot about a new country.

Bethannie’s Personal Statement

Hello everyone, my name is Bethannie Jamerson. I am a junior at Hampton University located in Hampton, Virginia currently studying psychology. Upon completion of my undergraduate studies, I plan on enrolling in a doctorate program of Industrial and Organizational Psychology. In the near future I plan on incorporating international aspects of research into my career path; I can truly say that re-search is my passion. As a psychology major, I am intrigued by the overall mental health of individuals. Attending an HBCU that is primarily female, I have witnessed the rapid rate at which mental health is plummeting within the female population, specifically in the African American community. This particular research interest has guided my desire to apply to the Harvard MIRT fellowship program. The program will aid in my continued commitment to discover methods to improve mental health globally particularly among young women. Through the Harvard MIRT program, I expect to experience a two-way exchange. I know that this research fellowship opportunity will provide a substantial amount of personal, cultural, and educational growth and development, while simultaneously addressing relevant health issues for Ethiopians through research.
Christina’s Personal Statement

Hello! My name is Christina Aponte. I am a junior at the State University of New York (SUNY) at Buffalo pursuing a major in Biomedical Sciences and minor in Spanish. I am a college student from Rochester, New York, and I am also the first in my family to pursue a professional degree. In the summer of 2012, I was fortunate to visit my family in Colombia, which sparked a passion in global health.

This summer, I am looking forward to building on my holistic education as an undergraduate as I learn about public health research, improve my Spanish fluency, and learn more about the differences in Chilean culture.

When I return to SUNY Buffalo, I look forward to implementing the skills I have learned during my research experience in my future career goals as an aspiring researcher and dentist. In the upcoming years, I will be applying to dental school and hope to join a growing number of female dentists in the class of 2022 and eventually enlist as a United States Naval General Dentist. I cannot wait to begin my journey with the Harvard MIRT Program this summer.

Christina Aponte
Undergraduate, SUNY Buffalo
MIRT Site: Chile

Rigoberto’s Personal Statement

Hello! My name is Rigoberto Perez Hernandez. I am from Watsonville, CA, home of the famous Martinelli’s Apple Cider. I am a rising senior in the College of Human Ecology at Cornell University majoring in Human Biology, Health, and Society with an emphasis in the pre-medical and public health curriculum. When I am not too busy studying for exams, I enjoy hiking around the Ithaca Gorges, cooking new types of foods, and dancing with the Cornell Sabor Latino Dance Ensemble. After earning my bachelor’s degree, I plan to obtain an MD/MPH. As an aspiring physician, I plan to continue serving underprivileged communities in developing nations and eliminate health-care disparities that persist. During my undergraduate career, my deep interest in public health was reinforced when I found out through my research mentor that mestizo and indigenous populations still relied heavily on the application of traditional healing practices, religious healing systems, and biomedical models. After coming back home for break, I found this to be especially true in my community. Having never traveled abroad since my childhood, I am extremely grateful and honored to take part in the Harvard MIRT program this summer. Through my experience, I expect to not only learn how to conduct population-based international health research, but also how social and economic factors influence epidemiological outcomes. I am looking forward to fully immersing myself in Chilean culture, forming long-lasting relationships with community members, and using my passion for biomedical research and Spanish language comprehension to help advance the progress of the people there.

Rigoberto Hernandez
Undergraduate, Cornell University
MIRT Site: Chile
Amber’s Personal Statement

Hi everyone! I'm Amber Domingue and I am a junior majoring of Spanish and Psychology at Xavier University of Louisiana. I've spent my whole life in New Orleans, except for my summers abroad. This will be my third time living in a Spanish speaking country. I am in love with the language and intrigued by the diverse cultures. Going to an HBCU has taught me to look at the world more holistically and cultivated my passion for empathizing with the broad spectrum of minority experiences. I am thrilled to do meaningful research on an international scale. Having the opportunity to use the skills I have been gaining throughout my college experience is a dream come true. I hope that during this fellowship I will learn research techniques that will be applicable in my professional field post-graduation. My long-term goal is to become a professor, and I hope to continue doing research as I prepare for that career.

Stephanie’s Personal Statement

Hello! My name is Stephanie Martinez and I am a junior at Mercy College. Currently I am a Health Science major, taking the prerequisite courses necessary for dental school. Working in a dental clinic and hospital, where the majority of the patients are part of a low-income demographic, has propelled a passion for the healthcare field. Ultimately, my main aspiration is to be a part of a non-profit organization where doctors of all calibers can join together and offer their expertise to underserved areas abroad. I have not had the privilege of traveling outside of New York as much as I’d like, so I am thrilled to have the opportunity to visit Peru this summer! 

Through the Harvard MIRT program I will be able to witness first hand the health disparities at a global level and learn how to become part of a solution. I cannot wait to meet other Harvard MIRT fellows, my mentors, and build long-lasting friendships as we immerse ourselves in a new culture.

“The traveler sees what he sees. The tourist sees what he has come to see.” - G.K. Chesterton
MIRT 2016 Pre-Travel Orientation

A two day pre-travel orientation program was held on May 5 and 6, 2016 at the Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health campus. This annual pre-travel orientation welcomes our new MIRT fellows and prepares 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, scientific writing, 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!

Donald Halstead (below left), Instructor and Director of Writing Program at the Harvard Chan School shared his expertise on scientific writing. Dr. Bizu Gelaye, Research Scientist, Harvard Chan School (below right) taught fellows introduction to Epidemiology and Biostatistics.

Alyssa Speier, Assistant Director for Regulatory Affairs & Research Compliance and Leslie Howes, Director of the Office of Human Research Administration provided fellows with a lecture and led case study discussions on ethical conduct of human subjects research.

Dr. Edward Ryan (below left), Professor at Harvard Medical School and Director of Tropical Medicine, Division of Infection Disease at Mass General Hospital shared his expertise on travel health. Elizabeth Walsh (below right), the Program Manager of Strategic Initiatives, Harvard Global Support Services shared her expertise on travel safety.

Karlotta Rosebaugh (above), MIRT Program Advisory Board Member and former Director of Health Sciences Minority Students at University of Washington provided a lecture on Cultural Competency.

Thank you so much to all who participated in making orientation a success!
Every year our MIRT fellows and faculty work on diverse research projects to address the needs of 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 2015-2016. Please visit the MIRT Program website to read the complete list of abstracts.

**Childhood abuse and suicidal ideation in a cohort of pregnant Peruvian women**

Qiu-Yue Zhong, MD, ScM; Anne Wells, BS (candidate); Marta B. Rondon, MD, MSc; Michelle A. Williams, ScD; Yasmin V. Barrios, MPH; Sixto E. Sanchez, MD, MPH; Bizu Gelaye, PhD, MPH

**Background:** Childhood abuse is a major global and public health problem associated with a myriad of adverse outcomes across the life course. Suicide is one of the leading causes of mortality during the perinatal period. However, few studies have assessed the relationship between experiences of childhood abuse and suicidal ideation in pregnancy. **Objective:** To examine the association between exposure to childhood abuse and suicidal ideation among pregnant women. Study Design: A cross-sectional study was conducted among 2,964 pregnant women attending prenatal clinics, in Lima, Peru. Childhood abuse was assessed using the Childhood Physical and Sexual Abuse Questionnaire. Depression and suicidal ideation were assessed using the Patient Health Questionnaire-9 scale. Logistic regression procedures were performed to estimate adjusted odds ratios and 95% confidence intervals adjusted for potential confounders. **Results:** Overall, the prevalence of childhood abuse in this cohort was 71.8% and antepartum suicidal ideation was 15.8%. The prevalence of antepartum suicidal ideation was higher among women who reported experiencing any childhood abuse compared to those reporting none (89.3% vs. 10.7%, P<0.0001). After adjusting for potential confounders, including antepartum depression and lifetime intimate partner violence, those with history of any childhood abuse had a 2.9-fold (adjusted odds ratios; 95% confidence intervals: 2.12-3.97) increased odds of reporting suicidal ideation. Women who experienced both physical and sexual childhood abuse had much higher odds of suicidal ideation (adjusted odds ratios =4.04; 95% confidence intervals: 2.88-5.68). Women who experienced any childhood abuse and reported depression had 3.44-fold (adjusted odds ratios; 95% confidence intervals: 1.84-6.43) increased odds of suicidal ideation compared with depressed women with no history of childhood abuse. Finally, the odds of suicidal ideation increased with increased number of childhood abuse events experienced (P-value for trend<0.001). **Conclusion:** Maternal history of childhood abuse was associated with increased odds of antepartum suicidal ideation. It is important for clinicians to be aware of the potential increased risk of suicidal behaviors among pregnant women with a history of childhood physical and sexual abuse. Zhong QY, et al. Am J Obstet Gynecol. PubMed PMID:27173085.

**BMJ Open** Evaluation of actigraphy-measured sleep patterns among children with disabilities and associations with caregivers’ educational attainment: results from a cross-sectional study

Xiaoli Chen,1 Juan Carlos Velez,2 Clarita Barbosa,2 Michael Pepper,2 Bizo Gelaye,2 Susan Redline,1,3,4 Michelle A Williams1

55.2%) and their primary caregivers in Chile. Children wore ActiSleep monitors for 7 days. A general linear model was fitted to generate least-square means and SEs of sleep efficiency ( proportion of the sleep period spent asleep) across caregivers’ education levels adjusting for children’s age, sex, disability type, caregiver–child relationship and caregivers’ age. Multivariable logistic regression analyses were conducted to estimate ORs and 95% CIs of longer sleep latency (≥30 min) and longer wake after sleep onset (WASO) (≥90 min) (a measure of sleep fragmentation) in relation to caregivers’ educational attainment. **Results:** Median sleep latency was 27.3 min, WASO 88.1 min and sleep duration 8.0 h. Mean sleep efficiency was 80.0%. Caregivers’ education was positively and significantly associated with children’s sleep efficiency (p trend<0.001). Adjusted mean sleep efficiency was 75.7% (SE=1.4) among children of caregivers <high school education, and 81.9% (SE=1.0) among children of caregivers >high school education. Compared to children whose caregivers had >high school, children of caregivers with <high school had higher odds of longer sleep latency (OR=3.27; 95% CI 1.12 to 9.61) and longer WASO (OR=5.95; 95% CI 1.91 to 18.53). Associations were consistent across disability types. **Conclusions:** Children with disabilities experience difficulties initiating sleep (prolonged sleep latency) and maintaining sleep (long WASO, low sleep efficiency). Among children with disabilities, lower level of caregivers’ education is associated with more sleep disturbances. Chen X, et al. BMJ Open 2015. PubMed PMID: 26644120.
Chinyere Ogbonna was an undergraduate student at Johns Hopkins University in 2004 when she participated in the MIRT Program in Bangkok, Thailand. During her fellowship she worked on a project titled “Maternal mid-arm circumference and other anthropometric measures of adiposity in relation to infant birth size among Zimbabwean women” (Acta Obstet Gynecol Scand. 2007).

“Since completing the MIRT program at the University of Washington, I graduated from Johns Hopkins University with a BA in Behavioral Biology. I then attended Temple University School of Medicine in Philadelphia, PA and completed my M.D. and M.P.H in Community Education. I attended the University of Cincinnati/The Christ Hospital Combined Family Medicine & Psychiatry Residency in Cincinnati, OH, where I was able to obtain training to provide integrated medical and psychiatric care to vulnerable and underserved populations (specifically low income, homeless, and veteran populations).

I’m currently a Stanford Addiction Medicine Fellow at Stanford Hospital & Clinics. My specific focus this year will be adult and adolescent dual diagnosis, and I’m hoping to gain some experience in perinatal substance abuse treatment. Being a MIRT Fellow provided me with exposure to the integration of medicine and public health, and influenced my decision to pursue a Master’s in Public Health during my medical school training. My affinity for public health has directly shaped the care I strive to provide to my patients by being a constant reminder to consider my patients in the context of their families, communities, and environment.”

As a MIRT Fellow (MIRT Peru 2015), Anne Wells worked with Drs. Sanchez, Gelaye and Williams on a project titled “Childhood Abuse and Suicidal Ideation in a Cohort of Pregnant Peruvian Women.” (Am J Obstet Gynecol. 2016). This spring, Anne received the Commencement Speaker Award at Rice University. This award honors a 2016 graduating student, undergraduate, or graduate, who exemplifies the values and causes of the 2016 Commencement Speaker Sheryl WuDunn. Ms. WuDunn is a Pulitzer-Prize winning journalist and author. Anne was recognized for her contributions to knowledge on social justice issues both on campus and internationally. Anne will be serving as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Cameroon for Community Health Education in September before applying to medical school.

“Wisdom is not a product of schooling but of the lifelong attempt to acquire it.” - Albert Einstein
Ijala Wilson (MIRT Ethiopia 2015) received the 2016 Chancellor’s Award for Student Excellence at SUNY Albany. This award recognizes students who have demonstrated an ability to integrate their academic achievement with leadership, campus involvement, career achievements, and community service. As a MIRT Fellow, Ijala worked on a project titled “Validation of the Patient health Questionnaire-2 among Ethiopian Adults.” After graduation, Ijala will be participating in the Doctoral Diversity Program at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, MD.


Harvard MIRT alumni presented their MIRT research findings at the April 2016 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!
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.

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Harvard MIRT Program Fellows at the pre-travel orientation program at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health.