Post-Trip Reflections of the Harvard MIRT 2016 Fellows

“MIRT is a once in a lifetime experience that nurtures their students to become global leaders who make positive changes in the world.” - Daniel Nguyen, Harvard MIRT 2016 Ethiopia

“I look back at my experience and no longer feel insecure about my potential as a first-generation Latino college student. The Harvard MIRT Program has allowed me to soar into the sky, closer to reaching my dream of becoming a medical doctor.” - Rigoberto Perez Hernandez, Harvard MIRT 2016 Chile

“I feel truly inspired by the lives of Ethiopians and I hope one day to be an inspiration to someone as well. I hope to one day to change the world in healthcare and public health. Thank you to the Harvard MIRT Program for giving me this amazingly unforgettable experience and I will always hold it close to my heart.” - LaQueishia Cummins, Harvard MIRT 2016 Ethiopia
Christina’s Post-Trip Reflection

In the beginning of our trip, funny stories were often shared and most of the time I did not understand. It was easy to disconnect myself and feel alone. Additionally, in regards to the timing of meals, it was difficult to become accustomed to when Chileans eat dinner and what they had for dinner. On the way to Santiago, I listened to a TED Talk where the speaker said, “If you are the one talking, you are not learning.” I took the advice of the speaker and got to know my host family and the staff of the Hospital del Trabajador.

As a result, the feeling of loneliness quickly subsided. Everyone had a story they felt passionate about sharing. When given the opportunity to listen, I felt welcome in their country and in their lives. In a period where I feel as though I have many different academic pathways to choose from, I spoke with doctors of the hospital and asked how they arrived to their current positions. More specifically, I asked if given the opportunity to go back to the time they began their journey, what would they do differently?

From this, I learned that the world is home to such a wide range of opportunities, and I should be open minded in order to avoid limiting myself to the plan I had originally set for myself.

Once I understood the typical schedule of my host family, I set up my own schedule and began to really experience Chile. I woke up earlier to work out, and after work I returned home to converse with my host family’s nanny. Conversing over dinner improved my Spanish while also helping to reflect on my trip so far. Afterwards, I would explore the surrounding area based on where she, the doctors of Hospital del Trabajador, and google searching advised me to visit.

This weekend, my grandmother is visiting from Colombia. After a summer in Chile through the Harvard MIRT Program, I will be able to tell her all about my trip without any help in translation from my mother. It is one thing to experience something new, but reflecting on said experiences and exchanging those ideas to another person is much more difficult. Even so, I cannot wait to tell her about all the places I have traveled to, the person I became abroad, and the woman I hope to become with the skillset I have brought back with me.
I am excited to tell her that studying abroad in Chile has reaffirmed my desire to become a dentist but has also inspired me to remain curious in my career and in my life. There is always room to grow and I have returned to the United States excited to begin the hard work that will lead me to success. The most rewarding aspect of this experience will be when my grandmother’s teachings come full circle as she hears where her instilled values and morals have led her granddaughter.

My biggest challenge was accepting that even after extensive effort in planning, it is likely that the plan will not go accordingly. I have always been the type of person to have a set plan for everything, but this summer I have learned to embrace life as it comes your way and in turn, be pleasantly surprised. Studying abroad is more than pictures of historical sites and specialty entrees, it is about getting a little lost and using what you know to find your way back. In the process, you discover much more about yourself than if you had followed a strict plan.

Going abroad to Chile, I expected to grow in my knowledge of medicine, return to the States with a better understanding of the lengthy research process, and how to condense that process and the analyzed data into a manuscript. Coming from a Colombian and Puerto Rican family, I set a personal goal to increase my fluency in the Spanish language. I believe that some of our traditions have been lost over the years and I wanted to shine light on the importance of coexisting between North American and South American cultures. However, the Harvard MIRT Program offered me much more than just an advanced skillset to be utilized in my academic career.

If you asked me last summer where I would spend the summer of 2016, I would never have believed that I, Christina Aponte from Rochester, New York, would be immersing myself in Chilean culture. However, it would not be due to the lack of interest. Rather, it would be due to the lack of self-confidence and in my potential.

I have returned with a new perspective that encourages me to want more out of my life. A summer in Chile with the Harvard MIRT Program has taught me that research knows no borders. I lived 5,300 miles away from home and was still working in a field I find passion in. Working with the Harvard MHIRT Program has taught me that putting in the extra effort for exams, taking the time to listen rather than speak, and having the confidence in myself to achieve more in my life, are the requirements to find greater success. As I take the time to listen to others, I will continue to learn and grow in my academic career and in my personal life.
Rigoberto’s Post-Trip Reflection

I cannot believe my summer is over. It seems as if it was only yesterday when Dr. Vélez picked me and Christina up from the Comodoro Arturo Merino Benítez International Airport in Chile. I remember how intimated I was at first to apply to the Harvard MIRT Program. Traveling abroad to a foreign country and exploring medicine in an entirely new context seemed so far to someone who has never left the United States. Nevertheless, I went by my old family adage: “El que perservera alcanza” (he/she who perseveres reaches) and ultimately applied.

Months later after being accepted and completing the program, I look back at my experience and no longer feel insecure about my potential as a first-generation Latino college student. The Harvard MIRT Program has allowed me to soar into the sky, closer to reaching my dream of becoming a medical doctor.

I must admit that I was a bit overwhelmed by my experience at first. Although I remained confident in my academic capabilities for the work this past summer, my biggest concern involved a mixture of social and personal brouhaha: I was afraid that I was not going to fit in because I was from the other side, el otro lado.
Rigoberto’s Post-Trip Reflection cont.

This quickly changed, however, when we began our first day at the hospital. After Christina and I introduced ourselves to the rest of the Rehabilitation team, we were greeted with open arms and warm smiles. At that moment, I realized that my experience in Chile was in fact going to be defined by real, authentic friendships with others coupled with the desire to learn from each other. My toughest moment coming back from Chile, was having to say goodbye to all of the people I have met during my time there.

My time abroad has challenged me to extend my knowledge beyond the classroom setting. From having to understand the complete definition of epidemiology to using advanced statistical analysis techniques to synthesize study conclusions, I have learned through experience. Moreover, my involvement with the patients at the Hospital del Trabajador has allowed me to see the resiliency and large capacity of the human spirit. Seeing the working population of Santiago successfully reintegrate themselves into society has no doubt brought a sense of appreciation as an aspiring physician. My experience abroad has only further stimulated my burning passion to bring about health equity in underrepresented populations.

Santiago de Chile has become my new home and I plan to come back someday to continue serving others. After my time in Chile, I have also come to realize that there are no borders to research and medicine; I hope to bring back what I learned from my time abroad into the United States. With a medical education ahead of me, I plan to utilize my capacity to learn in order to give back to the community that has allowed me to fly towards a life with endless opportunities. Now with my senior year about to begin at Cornell, I can confidently say that I will continue to pursue my dream of providing universal healthcare to everyone regardless of where they came from.

“And the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.” - T.S. Eliot
Bethannie’s Post-Trip Reflection

Bethannie Jamerson-Dowlen
Undergraduate, Hampton University
MIRT Site: Ethiopia

If I were asked 8 weeks ago “what I thought the worst part of my trip to Ethiopia would be”, I would not have known my answer would be “coming back to America.” I am so blessed to have had the opportunity to be immersed in such a rich culture as Ethiopia. Since this was my first time going out of the country, I had absolutely no idea what to expect. However, the research and the experience has allowed me to grow tremendously as an individual and in the realm of academia.

For a week Daniel, LaQueishia, and I volunteered at AHOPE Ethiopia, an orphanage for HIV positive children, teaching lessons on moral communication and peer pressure. The children were divided into three age groups and participated in seminars, open discussions, games, and other activities that maximized their moral communication and minimized the situations of peer pressure. One quote that really stuck with me was from the 15 and up age group “it is not the person that we are battling with, but the pressure of the situation.” This is one motto they use to deal with the peer pressure they are faced with; the end goal is to not only avoid peer pressure but also to help their friends out of the situation as well.

The way the children interacted with us throughout the week always left me with a warm heart. Every day I left AHOPE I repeatedly said to myself “you have the power to make the best out of any and every situation.” I went into the service learning experience ready to teach the children life lessons, not expecting for them to reciprocate this act.

Later on in our journey, Daniel, LaQueishia, and I took a trip to the Northern region of Ethiopia. We visited was Axum and saw the tomb of king Kaleb, ruins of Sheba’s palace, Mary’s church, and the building where the act of the covenant is being held. TWhile in beautiful scenic Lalibela, we saw the St. Yimrehane Kiristos Monastery cave church, 11 rock hewn churches, and even participated in an Orthodox Christian ceremony. We also had time to ourselves to explore the cities and indulge in personal entertainment such as traditional houses for dinner and dancing, and riding a camel. In Gondar, we saw medieval castles from 17th to mid-19th century and the Semien Mountains National Park. Just sitting in the hotel lobby learning about how some of the employees got to where they are now and how they are impacting the community was inspiring and admirable.

I learned not to take the small things for granted while in Ethiopia because I was so used to doing this in America. This past summer has allowed me to learn so much more about myself, values, beliefs and overall perception of life. Any spare time we were left with we found ways to explore Ethiopia and get back to our roots where many of our ancestors may have come from. I hope that I can take these morals and principles about life back to America and share with people in my community. Participating in the Harvard MIRT program has not only enriched my understanding of my field of study but also has confirmed my interest in pursuing higher education and conducting epidemiological research in cross-cultural settings.

“Great dreams of great dreamers are always transcended” - Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam
Daniel Nguyen
Undergraduate, Xavier University

MIRT Site: Ethiopia

I can honestly say that I am blessed to travel, with my experience in Ethiopia being the most memorable. I have developed so much as a person and a scholar. During our orientation in Boston, Dr. Gelaye told us “do more good for the country than the country can do for you.” I was confused because I thought that MIRT would just be another research program. Now that I am finished, I understand what he meant. MIRT is a once in a lifetime experience that nurtures their students to become global leaders who make positive changes in the world.

There are so many things that I miss from Ethiopia such as the unique culture and the friendly people. I made friends, and we discussed about our different viewpoints and beliefs. It was enlightening to understand their way of thinking. Another unforgettable moment was volunteering at AHOPE Ethiopia Orphanage. We taught the kids about peer pressure and effective communication. We taught lessons that they can hopefully use throughout the rest of their lives.

Our week of exploring the northern part of Ethiopia was wonderful and Ethiopia has a rich history. My personal favorite city in Ethiopia is Lalibela. The city is on top of a mountain so the views were absolutely breathtaking.

Going to see the churches of Lalibela was an adventure itself because we had to go through caves and trenches to reach our destination. The churches were built to be hidden to hide them from foreign invader.

Now that I am home, I want to thank everyone who had a part in making my time in Ethiopia absolutely amazing. Thank you to all my friends and family for sending me off and checking up on me. I also want to thank Dr. Lauren Friedman and Dr. Bizu Gelaye for keeping me on track with my research project. A special thanks to the Addis Continental Institute of Public Health for welcoming us and helping us with everything. I lived in Ethiopia for two months and found it to be such a beautiful country. I urge everyone to take an adventure and go to Ethiopia. I promise you that you will fall in love with the culture and have an amazing time.
The second half of our program was even more amazing than the first. We volunteered at AHOPE, an orphanage for kids with HIV, finished our manuscripts and posters, and went traveling to the northern region of Ethiopia. During our service learning experience at AHOPE we had three groups of kids (9-12, 12-15 and 15 and up). The main topics were communication skills and peer pressure. We played games and did other activities with the kids based on these topics.

This part of the program solidified my desire to go to graduate school, because it allowed me to see a community health project in Ethiopia. I want to work in healthcare and in communities, so this was good exposure to see what Ethiopia is doing for people with a life-long health condition. HIV is a major public health problem and being able to see how this organization is helping these children is truly touching. The kids are given the chance to be kids, have a home, a family, and go to school. During the first meeting with the director, Dr. Mengesha, he informed us of the purpose of AHOPE, the process of how they raise these
kids into independent adults and of successes in the past of different families working to help these kids strive. We played American games with them and did origami in addition to our communication activities. The older two groups were more interested in talking about peer pressure, and we all shared personal experiences of peer pressure. This was interesting to learn the types of peer pressure the teens deal with in Ethiopia compared to America.

In Lalibela, we got to talk to a lot of students who were striving to do well in school and be the best they could be. Here was where we got to see a cave church, rock-hewn churches and mummies. These churches also date back in time and are aesthetically made. We talked to the many Ethiopians in all the cities we traveled to and got to learn a lot about their history and their own personal backgrounds. Hearing these young adults speak about their lives and journeys through school was truly inspiring. I also see how appreciative they are of education and it makes me even happier to meet people who are very dedicated to their studies like myself.

Overall, going to Ethiopia was such a great experience because I saw the pride a lot of the people had in their country and history. They were excited to show us around and let us embrace their culture; this is something I will forever be grateful for. The Ethiopians we met were very open and willing to let us truly learn about them and their country and wanted to learn about us. This exchange of cultures was the most rewarding part of my experience. The daily interactions of these people during my 8 weeks abroad are something I am truly grateful for. These are things I would have never experienced staying in America. Seeing a world outside of the stressful and fast-paced American life really influenced me to travel more and to appreciate the small things in life. I feel truly inspired by the lives of Ethiopians and I hope one day to be an inspiration to someone as well. I hope to one day to change the world in healthcare and public health. Thank you to the Harvard MIRT Program for giving
Hannah Mbony
Undergraduate, Xavier University
MIRT Site: New Zealand

Driving through New Zealand, I saw the bluest of waters and the tallest of mountains, and I still can’t believe how lucky I was to have been in what is arguably one of the most beautiful countries in the world. They say, “You can’t beat Wellington on a good day.” It didn’t take long for me to see the truth behind that little sentiment. Standing on top of Mount Victoria the sun shining, not a cloud in sight, looking at a panoramic view of the city, the harbor, and the snow-capped mountains of the South Island is one of the many views I hope to have etched in my memory forever, and what proved to me that you really can’t beat Wellington on a good day.

During our last few weeks at Massey University, my cohort and I learned a lot regarding public health. We were able to meet with the director of the Centre for Public Health Research at Massey and the directors of the Healthy Families New Zealand Program, a nationwide government initiative that is trying to improve the health of New Zealanders by focusing on prevention. There is no denying that there is a clear gap seen in the health of the indigenous people and the non-indigenous people in New Zealand. However, both programs commitment to improving the lives and the health of all members of the community – both the natives as well as the rest of the population, was very inspiring. They showed me that as a future healthcare professional I will have the ability to improve the health of individuals, which can improve the health of their families, and in turn can improve the health of their communities.

My last week in Wellington was by far the most difficult. The brutal Wellington winters that we were warned about but had so luckily avoided finally caught up to us, but what was by far the most difficult was coming to terms with the fact that this amazing chapter in my life was coming to a close. During my eight weeks in Wellington I learned more than I ever expected or imagined I could learn in such a short amount of time, I developed lifelong friendships with my MIRT colleagues and host family, and I confirmed my goals of having a career that merges both public health and medicine. I will be forever grateful to my mentor, Dr. Lee Stoner and the Harvard MIRT program for this amazing opportunity.
Once I received acceptance into the MIRT program and an assignment to New Zealand, I could not contain my excitement. Anytime someone asked me how I felt, I could not describe it because I just did not know how. There were feelings of joy, anxiety, excitement, self-doubt, but overall I knew that it held a key to my future and a world of opportunity.

While in New Zealand, I dropped in on a well-oiled research machine. There were students from across the world, researchers, professors and faculty with renowned experience in public health working on various portions of an extensive project with one common goal, to produce researched interventions with translational impact on improving the quality of life and prevention of type 2 diabetes. Still, what was most impressive, everyone’s research depended on the collaborative efforts of the persons to their left and right.

I experienced that although research is a self-motivated discipline, one cannot forget the importance of communication, teamwork, patience, creativity, and the ability to still enjoy the people around us on the path to our goals.

This experience was a mirror, it reveled my capability of hard work outside of my military background.

As a veteran, my background is unique and working collectively in academia was an entirely new experience. Being in a foreign country gave me no other choice than to open up, perceive and address the contrasts between my previous military career and current academic pursuits.

In addition, the scenic views of New Zealand gave me time to reflect on my future academic pursuits and fine tune my plans. I feel more grounded in making the decision to enter into public health research as a career, because of the reach and personal impact it has on so many lives. The most rewarding aspect of the MIRT experience was the ability to be a part of Massey University team, and leave the project knowing that I made valuable contributions and have made the acquaintance of some pretty amazing people.
The feeling of knowing exactly what you want to do with your future does not compare with anything else. My MIRT experience is what has provided me with that certainty. As I look back on my summer, I can’t help but to do so with smile. One of my best memories from this summer was getting the opportunity to watch and help with a clinical trial. I was able to talk with patients and learn about who they are and why they participated in the trial. I was able to talk with the researchers and doctors and hear about the progress the participants have made. When I become a doctor, I plan to take part in clinical trials. This gave me the opportunity to see first-hand how a doctor would participate in a clinical trial. Apart from the invaluable research experience I received, I also built relationships that I know will go well beyond this program. Fellow MIRT participant Hannah Mbony and I had the opportunity to take a 5-day trip to the South Island and discover how beautiful New Zealand is together. The memories I made on that trip and the whole trip will last a lifetime. I am excited to, in the future, look at the skills and abilities I have and see which ones I directly learned from MIRT. Overall, I know that this program has assured me a successful and productive future not only from the relationships I built, but also from what I learned about myself.
Stephanie’s Post-Trip Reflection

Stephanie Martinez  
Undergraduate, Mercy College  
MIRT Site: Peru

Two months have come and gone, just like that. Two months filled with spectacular, unforgettable and unbelievable memories that I will cherish for the rest of my life. When you are about to go abroad there is an excitement and anticipation where you begin to envision the people you will meet, the places you will see, and the adventures you’ll embark on. But you can’t possibly prepare yourself for the adventure until you are living it. During your stay there, as you get used to the hustle and bustle, the food, and the apartment, you begin to adjust and call it “home.” I have had the privilege of spending two months in Lima, Peru and becoming familiar with a country that I would never have been able to set foot in.

Riding on the micros (buses), doing a bit of grocery shopping at Plaza Vea (supermarket), or simply trying out new cevicherias all became part of my new routine and I am saddened to have to leave. Becoming familiar with Dr. Sixto Sanchez, Raul, and his family was a privilege all on its own. Dr. Sanchez was an amazing mentor, and even in saying that, it doesn’t emphasize enough what a warm, welcoming and inspirational mentor he was.

Aside from his help throughout the entire process of writing my manuscript, he helped shape my career by being an exemplary role model of what sort of healthcare professional I’d love to be. Though he was an amazing mentor, the greatest honor is being able to call both him and Raul my friends. Interning at Dos De Mayo was an eye-opening experience. In witnessing Dr. Sanchez and most of his colleagues always improving the hospital by introducing new charting systems, medical equipment, and patient care, I got a glimpse of the change that one is able to have in the world of healthcare.

Overall, this entire experience cannot possibly be put into words. It would be impossible to capture all the memories my friend Amber and I shared in Lima. From first day interning at Dos De Mayo, all wide-eyed and nervous because we truly wanted to make a lasting impression, or waking up at 3:30 am to begin our long and adventurous hike to Machu Picchu, which we did twice. Or our three-day trip to the Selva (jungle) as we drove through the Andes and belted out old and new tunes. Looking back and reminiscing about our stories makes me smile because for the last two months we were practically family. We laughed and cried together, and bickered like sisters. The MIRT program could not have picked two better city girls to embark on this roller coaster of an adventure.

MIRT provided me the clarity and solidification that I needed to immerse myself in the healthcare field. I come away from this experience with such a great appreciation and respect for this collaborative discipline. So for that I will always be grateful. I’ve never been fond of goodbyes, so instead I’ll say thank you to those who made these two months the adventure that it was, those who helped me grow, and those who made me laugh until my stomach hurt. I will see you later!

“Being the richest man in the cemetery doesn't matter to me. Going to bed at night saying we've done something wonderful, that's what matters to me” - Steve Jobs
My time in Peru already seems surreal. I’ve been home almost a week and the adjustment to being home has been just as challenging as my initial adjustment to Lima. I’m having withdrawals from Ceviche and Spanish. I find myself confusing little things like "perdon" instead of "excuse me". Sometimes I translate my responses to questions asked in English from Spanish to English in my head before answering. The fondest memories I have of Peru are because of the people I shared them with. Dr. Sanchez opened his home to us, and we spent many meals together discussing the different cultures of Peru and the US. I think my biggest challenge has been living without Stephanie. We had quite a few obstacles together: losing our keys, losing our passports, planning our trip to Machu Picchu, and re-planning our trip to Machu Picchu. Having a supportive roommate made every mistake and lesson funny. I learned to be flexible in a way I never thought was possible. When everything seemed to be going wrong, we had each other. We couldn’t dwell on how we messed up. We just tried to do better the next time.
My trip to Machu Picchu with Stephanie was full of challenges. The amount of people who visit daily requires each trip to be meticulously planned. It isn't just about seeing the ruins, but also experiencing the city of Cusco. There are endless activities offered in the surrounding areas with guided tours in almost any language. We chose to take a city tour of Cusco on our first day and spent the following day travelling by bus to Hidroelectrica. Once there we walked about two hours and forty minutes to Aguas Calientes. We spent the night there and woke up at 3AM to hike to Machu Picchu the next morning. The sun wasn't up yet and there were no lights in the streets. Everyone was walking with handheld flashlights. We were practically in the front of the line for the gates to open at 5AM. We hiked on an unyielding incline for about two hours as dawn broke. There were hundreds of people, mostly in their twenties, taking this journey with us. All you could see were trees, steps, and backpacks until we got to the top. When we finally entered the city at the top, we were equal with the clouds. There aren't words to describe what we saw next.

The work side of our trip was demanding, but constantly trying to impress Dr. Sanchez was all the motivation we needed. **Collaborating with Dr. Sanchez helped me grow the most during my trip. His mixture of confidence in our abilities and demand for excellence encouraged me to do my best work.** I learned from him through hands-on experience and direction observation. Every day he worked all day at Dos de Mayo and in the evenings he would still make time to consult with us. He read every word of our manuscripts and edited them tirelessly. Additionally, he allowed us to network all over the hospital in order to get the most holistic perspective on our projects that was possible. I was fortunate enough to shadow doctors in the maternity hospitalization ward. Dr. Sanchez's dedication and passion to his work, as well as ours, fueled our projects. Working with him was the most surprising, demanding, and rewarding part of my trip.
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 two studies from MIRT 2015-2016. Please visit the MIRT Program website to read the complete list of abstracts.

### Diagnostic validity of the Patient Health Questionnaire-2 (PHQ-2) among Ethiopian adults

**Background:** The Patient Health Questionnaire-2 (PHQ-2) is an ultra-brief questionnaire widely used by researchers and clinicians to detect major depressive disorder (MDD). Despite its individual and societal impact, MDD is often undetected and untreated particularly among sub-Saharan Africans. We conducted this study to evaluate the reliability and validity of using the PHQ-2 as a screen for MDD among Ethiopian adults. **Methods:** A total of 926 adults attending outpatient departments in a major referral hospital in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia participated in this study. Construct validity was assessed by examining associations of PHQ-2 scores with World Health Organization Quality of Life (WHOQOL) domains. We assessed criterion validity and performance characteristics against an independent, blinded, and psychiatrist administered semi-structured Schedules for Clinical Assessment in Neuropsychiatry (SCAN) interview using measures of sensitivity, specificity and receiver operating characteristics (ROC) curves. **Results:** The PHQ-2 items showed good reliability (intraclass correlation coefficient = 0.92). Quality of life, as reflected by subscale scores for four WHO-QOL domains, was significantly lower among patients with increasing PHQ-2 scores demonstrating good construct validity. ROC analysis and Youden Index showed that a PHQ-2 threshold score of 3 offered optimal discriminatory power with respect to the diagnosis of MDD via the clinical interview (sensitivity = 74% and specificity = 60%). **Conclusion:** The Amharic language version of the PHQ-2 had good sensitivity and fair specificity for detecting MDD compared against a psychiatrist administered SCAN diagnosis. This study provides evidence for the PHQ-2 as a reliable and valid ultra-brief screening tool for initial identification of MDD.


### Can an ecosystem approach to health promotion succeed where reductionism fails?

The current reductionist approach to the Western biomedical health model fails to address the complex multifactorial environmental, socio-cultural and lifestyle behavioural determinants of non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Here, Wayne Lawrence, Beemnet Neway, Gifty Addae, Jeremy Lanford, Olivia Orta, Michelle Williams and Lee Stoner, from the Multidisciplinary International Research Training Program, Department of Epidemiology, Harvard School of Public Health, Boston, Massachusetts; Wellington Regional Hospital, Wellington, New Zealand; and the School of Sport and Exercise, Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand, argue that application of an ecosystem approach to health care will aid in shifting the focus from treatment to the prevention of chronic diseases and thus reverse the rising global incidence of NCDs.

MIRT Alumni Spotlight: Anjalene Whittier

Anjalene Whittier was an undergraduate student at the University of Rochester in 2013 when she participated in the Harvard MIRT Program in Punta Arenas, Chile. During her MIRT fellowship, Anjalene contributed to a project titled “Eveningness Chronotype, Daytime Sleepiness, Caffeine Consumption, and Use of Other Stimulants Among Peruvian University Students.” (Whittier et al. J Caffeine Res. 2014 Mar 1;4(1):21-27. PubMed PMID: 24868492)

After absolutely loving my time in the Harvard MIRT program in Punta Arenas, Chile, I went on to participate in a similar opportunity in Puebla, Mexico through the Latino Mental Health Training Program. I then graduated from the University of Rochester with a BA in Psychology, and continued my education with a Master’s of Clinical Research in International Health at the University of Barcelona in Spain, I am now pursuing a PhD in Psychiatry at the University of Cambridge in England through a Gates Cambridge Scholarship.

Applying to MIRT was one of the best decisions I ever made. Besides being an amazing summer, participating helped define my career and opened so many doors. When I got in touch with Dr. Gelaye to let him know that I had to find an external master's thesis project and supervisor, he was more than happy to allow me to join his work on depression and suicidal behavior in Ethiopia. He continued to be an excellent mentor and source of support, even well after the program while I was living in a different country and affiliated with a separate institution.

I’m so grateful for having had the chance to participate in MIRT. My time in Chile helped kick start my career in ways I never thought possible. I always recommend this program to others -- it’s a truly fantastic opportunity.
Andrew Hillman was an undergraduate student at Queens College when he participated in the Harvard MIRT Program in Bangkok, Thailand. As a MIRT Fellow, Andrew contributed to a project titled “Association of High-Sensitivity C-Reactive Protein and Metabolic Syndrome among Thai Adults.” (Hillman et al. 2010. Asian Biomed (Res Rev News). Jun;4(3):385-393. PubMed PMID: 22241575)

Andrew Hillman
MIRT Fellow 2009
MIRT Site: Thailand

After graduating from Queens College in 2010, I decided to obtain a masters in Motor Learning from Teachers College, Columbia University. In 2012, I was accepted to Weill Cornell Medical College. Using my platform as a medical student at WCMC, I continued my passion for mentorship as the director of the Weill Cornell Youth Scholars Program, a 4-week summer enrichment program geared towards sparking an interest in medicine and science in high school students from underprivileged backgrounds. Well-recognized by high schools and parents around the New York City area, the Youth Scholars Program has become one of the most selective summer enrichment programs for high school students.

Congratulations Michelle and Cheryl!

We are very excited to report that our own Dr. Michelle Williams and Dr. Cheryl Anderson (MIRT 1994 alumna) have been elected to the National Academy of Medicine (NAM). Election to the NAM is considered one of the highest honors in the fields of health and medicine and recognizes individuals who have demonstrated outstanding professional achievement and commitment to service. Congratulations Michelle and Cheryl!
In addition to their research and travel experiences, our MIRT students are also exceptional photographers! Below is a sample of the outstanding photos taken during their fellowships in Ethiopia, Peru, Chile, and New Zealand.
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!

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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View of the New Zealand countryside (photo credit: Sequoya Simon)