CONGRATULATIONS TO ELEVEN NUTRITION STUDENTS WHO RECEIVED THEIR DEGREES AT 2019 COMMENCEMENT

The following students have received their Harvard degrees at the Harvard T.H. Chan School’s Convocation Ceremony on May 29, 2019. Although their different backgrounds and research interests vary considerably, all of these students are united in a strong desire to improve public health both locally and globally, promote healthy lifestyles, and change public policy that will help to improve public health overall. Some of their unique personal stories are below.

Listed by graduation month, the Nutrition Department’s graduates for the 2018-19 academic year are:

**November 2018**
Andres Ardisson Korat
Tayla Ash
Selma Gicevic
Alvin Tran
Edward Yu

**March 2019**
Nathalie Marchand
Yang Hu

**May 2019**
Laila Al-Shaar (our 1st PhD graduate)
Allison Andraski (BPH program)
Mariel Arvizu Boy
Ramadhani Abdallah Noor
I have had the wonderful opportunity to study the effects diet and lifestyle on osteoarthritis risk in the NHS I cohort under the mentorship of Dr Walter Willett, Dr Bernard Rosner, Dr Matthew Liang, and Dr Charles Ratzlaff for my dissertation. This is a health outcome that hasn’t received much previous research attention in terms of modifiable risk factors and so is a field where I can make a great impact by elucidating the dietary factors that could prevent women from suffering with this painful disease in later life. Dr. Willett kindly and expertly guided me through my analyses. During my time as a doctoral student I also had the exciting opportunity to work with Dr Ganmaa Davaasambuu to write a first-author paper on prenatal health in Mongolia, which was published in Pregnancy Hypertension, and with Dr Majken Jensen to write a first-author review paper on diet, lifestyle and cognitive health, which was published in the American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine. There are so many brilliant and generous faculty members that I had the great honor of learning from and working with, such that, my time at Harvard will always be remembered with great pride and fondness.

In addition to pursuing academic endeavors over the past several years, I have had two beautiful children, Eva (age 3) and Theodore (age 1), who remain my greatest achievements. Eva loves to talk about her own magical worlds where unicorns and fairies have great adventures, and Theodore runs around the house at high speed while trying to escape outside every chance he gets. Neither are great fans of eating their vegetables, but mommy tries every day.

After graduating, I began my post-doctoral research fellowship, with a joint appointment at Brigham & Women’s Hospital and Harvard Medical School, to study diet, lifestyle and the risk of rheumatoid arthritis under the guidance of Dr Bing Lu. I also provide nutrition research for the Pritikin Longevity Center + Spa in Miami, where consuming a plant-based diet to encourage weight loss and renewed health is emphasized.

Thank you to the Nutrition department for believing in me—it has changed my life forever and for the better. And thank you to my family for supporting me on this journey.
Laila Al-Shaar, PhD
Departments of Population Health Sciences and Nutritional Epidemiology

Laila will be graduating from the PhD program in Population Health Sciences—Nutritional Epidemiology, with a concentration in Obesity Epidemiology and Prevention. Her dissertation, “Body Mass Index and Physical Activity Among Adults with Coronary Heart Disease” focused on studying these factors among survivors of myocardial infarction in the NHS and HPFS cohorts. She also worked on the validation of the semiquantitative food frequency questionnaire in the Men’s Lifestyle Validation Study.

Prior to joining Harvard, Laila worked as a data manager and analyst at the American University of Beirut (AUB), Lebanon, managing databases and studies on vascular diseases. She was selected to be a Bernard Lown Scholar at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, after which she started collaborating with the Nutrition Department and attending courses at the School.

Throughout these years, Laila is particularly very grateful to her mentor Dr Walter Willett, who not only shared with her some of his profound knowledge in the field of Nutritional Epidemiology, but also provided an unparalleled support and guidance which made her dissertation run very smoothly. She is also thankful to her dissertation committee members (Drs JoAnn Manson, Eric Rimm, and Bernard Rosner), co-authors, staff, and peers who she was so lucky to work with.

Laila is looking forward to continue to work with Drs Willett and Rimm at the Nutrition Department as a post-doctoral fellow in Cardiovascular Epidemiology. But before starting her new job, Laila is planning to go back to Lebanon to spend some quality time with her family.

Yang Hu, ScD
Department of Nutrition

I have been studying in Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health for almost 8 years. I came Boston in 2011 as a Masters student in the Department of Epidemiology during which time I learned epidemiology and biostatistics in many great courses. This laid a concrete ground for my later studies. It was not until the summer of 2012 that I first entered the door of the Department of Nutrition. I was working with Dr. Frank B Hu, my later mentor, in a small project. Fascinated by our sophisticated Harvard cohorts’ dietary data, I became very interested in studying how nutrition factors are linked with diseases and I was determined to go down this career path as far as I could. My doctoral training was both challenging and rewarding. Instead of focusing on a single research topic, I also had the opportunity to work with projects in other areas such as cancer and environmental epidemiology which widened my academic scope. I greatly appreciate the faculty members in the Department of Nutrition who made this a great mentorship and I also want to thank my friends and classmates in the school as they provide strong support for both my study and life. I spent my best 8 years in the School and I am not leaving as I will continue my career in the Nutrition Department as a postdoctoral fellow working with Drs Qi Sun and Edward Giovannucci. I don't how long I will stay but as long as I am here, I will keep working hard to make our department an even more distinguished place for nutrition science.
After defending my dissertation, I pursued my postdoctoral training at the Yale School of Medicine in New Haven, Connecticut. I’m excited to announce I’ll be joining the faculty of the University of New Haven School of Health Sciences as a tenure-track Assistant Professor of Public Health in Fall 2019.

During my doctoral training in the Department of Nutrition, I was able to investigate body image ideals and dietary behaviors, including unhealthy weight control behaviors, among sexual minority men in Massachusetts. Furthermore, I was able to present some of my findings on Beacon Hill to Massachusetts lawmakers who were considering a bill to protect youth from accessing potentially harmful dietary supplements for weight control. Engaging in innovative research and working alongside lawmakers in the state of Massachusetts were rewarding opportunities offered to me at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health.

Allison Andraski, PhD
Biological Sciences in Public Health

Allison Andraski is a recent graduate from the Biological Sciences in Public Health PhD program at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. She completed her thesis work in Dr Frank Sacks’s lab where she studied the metabolism of several proteins on high-density lipoprotein (HDL), the “good cholesterol,” in humans. Allison found that HDL is a heterogeneous particles system composed of several protein-bases subsystems, each with its own unique metabolism and distribution across HDL sizes. She also found that the metabolism of several HDL proteins can be altered by dietary fat and carbohydrate. Allison plans to continue to pursue a career in research, but is still exploring her options and deciding on next steps.
Andres Ardisson Korat, ScD  
Departments of Nutrition and Epidemiology

While at the Nutrition department, my dissertation work focused on the epidemiology of cardiometabolic diseases where I specifically examined the association between dairy fat intake and type-2 diabetes in the Health Professionals Follow-Up Study and the Nurses’ Health Study cohorts. Outside my dissertation, I had the opportunity to contribute to several fatty acid biomarker studies in the context of type-2 diabetes with the Fatty Acids and Outcomes Research Consortium (FORCE). I am grateful to my committee members (Drs Frank Hu, Qi Sun, Walter Willet, Bernard Rosner and Frank Sacks) for their mentorship and guidance throughout my time as a student here.

Since last July, I have been working as a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Channing Division of Network Medicine, Brigham and Women's Hospital, studying the relationship between energy balance variables and cancer risk. Outside of work, I enjoy cooking, running and spending time with my wife and 3-year old daughter.

Tayla Ash, ScD  
Social & Behavioral Sciences and Public Health Nutrition

Tayla Ash, ScD, graduated with a dual degree in Social & Behavioral Sciences and Public Health Nutrition. Interested in improving child nutrition and developmental outcomes, Tayla’s research largely focuses on childhood obesity prevention with an emphasis in understanding and addressing racial/ethnic and socioeconomic disparities. Her dissertation examined the emergence of differences in sleep outcomes among infants from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Further, using both quantitative and qualitative methods, she investigated the contextual factors contributing to these differences. Continuing this line of research, she is currently a Presidential Postdoctoral Research Fellow at Brown University in the Department of Behavioral & Social Sciences and at the Center for Health Equity Research, and was recently awarded a grant by the Hassenfeld Child Health Innovation Institute to pilot a prenatal birth cohort study focused on associations between maternal mental health, sleep, and infant feeding among Hispanic women.
MORE STUDENT NEWS

These graduates received their certificates for the Obesity Epidemiology and Prevention concentration: Brenna Kirk, Vita Tambone, and Laila Al-Shaar. The Program in Obesity Epidemiology and Prevention (Obesity Program) at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health is an interdisciplinary concentration which includes the departments of Epidemiology, Nutrition, Social and Behavioral Sciences, Global Health and Population, Environmental Health and Health Policy and Management. This concentration is geared toward students who desire careers in research, teaching, and programs related to obesity and was created to meet the challenge of the escalating obesity epidemic in the US and worldwide through multidisciplinary research and training, international collaboration, and public health policy and outreach. It is designed to build on a strong base of ongoing research, teaching and training in obesity epidemiology and prevention at HSPH.

PhD student Hannah Cory asks the question “Can nutrition education solve the obesity epidemic?” in a recent Veritalk podcast titled Food Episode 4: Your Body Isn't Broken. Veritalk is produced at Harvard’s Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. In each three-episode miniseries of Veritalk, you’ll hear how PhD students from different fields are trying to answer really big questions about the world. Hannah had asked that question over and over while working as a dietician in a public school system. Now, as a PhD candidate in Population Health Sciences, her research seeks to uncover the connection between fat-phobia, racism, and obesity in the US.

To hear more about what Hannah has to say: https://simplecast.com/s/f0fa1afb
In 2016 Laila Al-Shaar moved to Boston from Beirut, Lebanon, to begin her studies as a doctoral student in the Department of Nutrition at the Harvard Chan School, leaving her husband behind in Beirut while she brought her two young children, Layan and Daniel, with her to Brookline. For the next 3 years she balanced the hectic life of a student with motherhood. Dr Walter Willett, Professor of Epidemiology and Nutrition and Al-Shaar’s advisor, stated “Frankly, I don’t know how Laila has been able to balance all of her responsibilities at the same time, but she does so with a smile and enthusiasm.”

Prior to coming to Harvard Chan School as a student, Al Shaar was accepted into the Bernard Lown Scholars in Cardiovascular Health Program, which offers training on cardiovascular disease prevention programs to mid-career health professionals from developing countries. Laila remarked [that it was] “the best thing I’ve ever done.” During her time as a Lown Scholar in 2014-2015, Al-Shaar worked closely with Willett. During this time she realized that cardiovascular diseases were a major problem in Lebanon. However, there were no good long-term data that could actually be analyzed and used to craft interventions and policies. Because of the Lown Scholars program Al-Shaar became determined to accomplish two goals: Establish the first longitudinal cohort study in Lebanon to examine cardiovascular diseases and earn a PhD from Harvard Chan School.

During here time as a doctoral student, Al-Shaar and a few classmates conducted a review of the scientific literature on the health effects of energy drinks. The literature review was so thorough and timely that it was published in Frontiers in Public Health and garnered international news coverage.

Her peers and mentors have also recognized her as an emerging leader in public health. Al-Shaar was nominated to the Council on Epidemiology and Prevention Early Career Development Committee, and was awarded two years of research funding from the American Heart Association. With that funding, she used data from the Nurses’ Health Study and Health Professionals Study to explore the association between physical activity and mortality among people who had myocardial infarction.

This work became the foundation for her thesis, which examined the so-called obesity paradox (the idea that people who were overweight or obese might actually have better survival rates after a heart attack
than people in a healthy weight range). “It was a particularly difficult thesis topic,” Willett said. “And she developed a novel approach that has clarified the longstanding paradox.”

In fact, her thesis demonstrated that there was no benefit for being overweight or obese because the so-called “paradox” seen in earlier studies was because some of those in the healthy weight range were there because they had lost weight without increasing their physical activity or improving their diet. Thus, their weight loss was likely due to the severity of their heart disease.

Perhaps most impressive of all, however, is that Al-Shaar completed her PhD in under three years. She will soon begin as a postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Nutrition.

To read more: https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/news/features/following-her-heart/

PhD student promotes ‘food literacy’ in schools

Scott Richardson, a student in the inaugural cohort of the PhD in Population Health Sciences program (a joint collaboration between Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and Harvard’s Faculty of Arts and Sciences), and who believes that school meals should be treated as part of the educational experience, was profiled in an April 29, 2019 Harvard Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (GSAS) article. His research is aimed at providing evidence-based improvements to school nutrition policy so that children have consistent access to healthy foods as well as the knowledge to make healthy food choices throughout their lives.

According to Richardson, “Better school meals can not only boost academic achievement, but are also a linchpin in solving the hunger-poverty cycle. That one kid in school who chooses the oiliest, most unhealthy meal during break? Who chooses the same thing again the next day, and the next? These interventions in food literacy are for them.”

Read the GSAS article: Better Food for Thought

Katrina Soriano, Director of Administration and Finance, Department of Nutrition; and Interim Director of Administration, Department of Genetics and Complex Diseases, has received the 2019 Sarah K. Wood Award for Outstanding Staff Performance. This award was established in 2015 by friends and admirers of Sarah K. Wood in tribute to her many years of exceptional service to Harvard University and the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. Sarah began her tenure at the School in 1980 as assistant to Dr. Harvey Fineberg. When he was named dean of the School in 1984, she became his senior administrative assistant, moving in 1997 to assist him in his role as University provost. Sarah later returned to the School, serving as assistant director of volunteer programs and executive education in the Office for External Relations from 2003 through 2012. The Sarah K. Wood Award for Outstanding Staff Performance recognizes one staff member who demonstrates the qualities of dedication, competence, positive attitude, initiative, and ability to mentor, encourage, and inspire others, in addition to a demonstrated commitment to the School and its mission.
The following people were awarded the *Simon J. and Arpi A. Simonian Research Excellence in Nutrition Prize* which recognizes outstanding academic achievement by a student or students within the Harvard School of Public Health Department of Nutrition:

*Abrania Marrero-Hernandez* (Advisor, *Professor Josiemer Mattei*)
*Sophia Hua* (Advisor, *Professor Eric Rimm*)

**THREE FROM NUTRITION DEPARTMENT WIN POSTER DAY AWARDS!**
The fifth annual **Harvard Chan Poster Day** was held on **Thursday, April 25th** in the Kresge Cafeteria. Organized by the Harvard Chan Postdoctoral Association and supported by the Office of Faculty Affairs, the Office of Student Affairs and the Dean’s office, this event brought together students, postdocs, and research associates across the diverse academic departments at the School to share research results, engage in interdisciplinary interactions, and generate new ideas.

Following remarks by Dean Michelle Williams, awards were presented for best posters. Three winners were from the Nutrition Department:

- **Best Overall Poster:** Feiby Nassan
- **Best Postdoc & Research Associates Poster:** Andrew Synn
- **Runner up, Postdoc & Research Associates Poster:** Xiao Luo
- **Best Graduate Student Poster:** Aviva Musicus
- **Runner up, Graduate Student Poster:** Louis a Smith
- **Best Poster Image (abstract booklet front cover):** Andrew Synn
- **Best Poster Image (abstract booklet back cover):** Szu-Ta Chen

**Omega-6 fatty acids may be linked with lower risk of heart disease**

According to a recent study published in *Circulation* by Matti Marklund et al. higher levels of omega-6 polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFAs), which are found in seeds and seed oils such as flaxseed and grapeseed, were associated with lower risk of stroke, heart disease, and even early death.

**Dr Frank Hu**, Fredrick J. Stare Professor of Nutrition and Epidemiology, and a co-author, explains that “while omega-3 PUFAs are generally considered healthy, previous studies have been inconclusive regarding the health effects of omega-6 PUFAs”. Hu states that one concern has been that consumption of omega-6 PUFAs may promote inflammation and therefore increase disease risk; however, that hypothesis has not been supported by the evidence. Hu further states that “This new study provides further evidence that higher intake of omega-6 fatty acids, especially linoleic acid, is not associated with an increased risk of cardiovascular disease. In fact, there is pretty consistent and robust evidence that higher levels of omega-6 in blood or adipose tissue is associated with a reduced risk.”

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To read the TCTMD article containing Dr Hu’s commentary: [Help, Not Harm: Omega-6 PUFAs Linked With Lower Risk of CVD Events](https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/news/hsph-in-the-news/omega-6-fatty-acids-heart-disease/?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=kiosk-05-02-2019&utm_source=newsletter)

**Premature deaths can be reduced by global improvement in dietary quality**

According to a new study led by **Dong (Daniel) Wang** et al., more than 11 million premature deaths could be prevented by improving dietary quality around the world. This is roughly 24% of the total deaths in 2017.

In order to estimate diet-related health outcomes for millions of people around the world, the researchers used the Alternative Healthy Eating Index (AHEI). The AHEI is used to score a person’s diet based on the
quality of the food they eat and is a strong predictor of major chronic diseases. Higher scores indicate healthier diets.

The study found that from 1990 to 2017, the average global AHEI score increased modestly from 45.4 to 50. It also found that diet quality varied substantially across the world. The authors estimated that improving the current global diet could prevent 1.6 million cancer deaths, 3.9 million coronary artery disease deaths, 1 million stroke deaths, 1.7 million respiratory disease deaths, 0.4 million neurodegenerative disease deaths, 0.5 million kidney disease deaths, 0.6 million diabetes deaths, and 1.2 million digestive disease deaths.


Are artificial sweeteners healthier than sugar?

According to an April 26, 2019 Consumer Reports article, the health risks of consuming too much added sugars—those added to foods, as opposed to those naturally present—can include weight gain and increased risk of high blood pressure, diabetes, stroke, heart disease, and some cancers. However, recent evidence suggests that switching to artificial sweeteners may carry similar risks.

Dr Vasanti Malik, Adjunct Lecturer on Nutrition and Research Scientist in the Department of Nutrition, states that “Sugar substitutes may be useful, however, to help people transition to a healthier diet, especially when it comes to sugary drinks”. Further, “The goal isn’t to get people to switch from sugar to diet [drinks]; it’s to get people to switch from sugar to water, [although] diet [drinks or foods] might be an intermediate way to help them.”

Read the Consumer Reports article: The Truth About Sugar vs. Artificial Sweeteners


MONDAY NUTRITION SEMINARS

The Department of Nutrition holds its weekly Monday Nutrition Seminar Series every Monday throughout the academic year. The talks are varied, but they highlight the many different aspects of cutting-edge research that is currently being conducted in the fields of nutrition and global public health. These seminars are held from 1:00-1:20 pm in Kresge 502 at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. The seminars are free and open to the public.

There will be no more Monday Nutrition Seminar Series for this academic year. Our regular Monday Seminar Series will resume in Fall 2019.

For more information, contact: hfarmer@hsph.harvard.edu
May is Mediterranean Diet Month
The Mediterranean diet is a primarily plant-based eating plan that includes daily intake of whole grains, olive oil, fruits, vegetables, beans and other legumes, nuts, herbs, and spices. Learn more: https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/healthy-weight/diet-reviews/mediterranean-diet/

Make it at home
This super smooth hummus is made from green lentils, and dressed up with plenty of bright herbs, olives, and some crunchy seeds. Get the recipe: https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/green-lentil-hummus-herbs-olives/

Spotlight on Salt and Sodium
Most Americans consume at least 1.5 teaspoons of salt per day, or about 3400 mg of sodium, which is far more than our bodies need: https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/salt-and-sodium/

Food Feature: Kale
Who knew a vegetable could be so cool? Learn more about the history and research behind this popular leafy green, as well as recipes and cooking tips: https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/kale/

What is EVERGREEN: The EVidEnce-based Research GRoup to EvaluatE Nutrition policy?
EVERGREEN: The EVidEnce-based Research GRoup to EvaluatE Nutrition policy is a team of faculty, researchers, and students at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health that are committed to improving population health through research and evaluation of U.S. nutrition policies and programs. Led by Dr. Eric Rimm, in the Departments of Nutrition and Epidemiology, and Dr. Sara Bleich, in the Department of Health Policy and Management, this interdisciplinary research group investigates a wide variety of policy-relevant nutrition topics in the public and private sectors, such as the impact of financial incentives on the diets of SNAP participants, the effects of the Philadelphia beverage tax on prices and pass-through charges, the influence of food industry marketing programs such as Box Tops on consumer choice for families, and the impact of supermarket choice architecture, such as promotions and product placement, on food purchases, among many other projects.

Interested in our group?
• Check out our website: https://sites.sph.harvard.edu/evergreen/
• Read our newsletter: https://mailchi.mp/7c35d077c445/newest-updates-from-evergreen-520417
• Contact Aarohee Fulay (afulay@hsph.harvard.edu) for more information!
Save-the-Date!

50th Anniversary of the White House Conference on Food, Nutrition, and Health

10/3/19 and 10/4/19

Use the link below to sign-up for the event’s mailing list and more information

https://sites.tufts.edu/foodnutritionandhealth2019/

Mark your calendar for a historic nutrition policy event hosted by The Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy and the Department of Nutrition at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health.

Activities will start the afternoon (4:00-6:30 pm) of 10/3/19 with a keynote speaker, panel discussion, and reception hosted by the Department of Nutrition at the Harvard Chan in the Kresge Café.

On Friday, 10/4/19 there will be a full day event with panel discussions and speakers at The Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy.

More details will follow.
Save the date!

The Nutrition Department’s Picnic will be on September 14th, 2019 from 3:00 pm to 7:00 pm at the Larz Anderson Park in Brookline, at the BBQ Shelter (same venue as last year).
A Harvard MPH in Nutrition

Acquire skills in nutrition practice, policy, and communication along with foundational knowledge in nutritional science, epidemiology, and public health.

This 65-credit program is 1.5 years (3 semesters) in length, beginning in September and ending in December of the following year. The summer session features a unique practicum experience allowing students to create a project with real-world application.

Earn a Master of Public Health (MPH) degree that explores the role nutrition plays in the health and well-being of the world’s populations from a variety of vantage points, including environmental, socioeconomic, political, and cultural factors.

Core courses emphasize methodological strategies to develop, analyze, and evaluate interventions, programs, and policies typically used in public health nutrition. Students may also choose from a variety of electives tailored to personal career goals and interests such as nutrition policy, health disparities, nutrition epidemiology, global health, social and behavioral sciences, and environmental sustainability.

Who should apply?

The program is suitable for those both early or established in their careers, who wish to develop or further their expertise in nutrition. Prospective students will need to meet the following:

- A bachelor’s degree from an accredited institution.
- At least two years of post-baccalaureate work

For more information about application requirements or other program details, contact Stefanie Dean, Academic Coordinator: