



# SBS

Social and Behavioral Sciences  
Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health

## newsletter

SPRING 1, 2015

### LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Dear SBS community:

Happy New Year!

I hope you all enjoyed the holidays. Now it's back to reality and the Arctic blasts of New England winter (with the notable exception of students enrolled in SBS 550 - see picture below). To keep up the cheer and to boost morale, we are hosting the SBS New Year Party on Wednesday, January 28 from 4.00-6.00 pm in the Kresge Cafeteria. I look forward to seeing you there.

I'm also pleased to announce two new courses in Spring 2 -- SBS 513: Measuring and Reporting Health Disparities taught by Reginald Tucker-Seeley and SBS 514: Reducing Socioeconomic & Racial/Ethnic Inequalities in Health taught by David Williams.

I applaud our students' efforts in bringing attention to issues of racism and public health last month. We strongly endorse Dean Frenk's statement that: "We must recruit, retain and educate students to be leaders in addressing the health challenges posed by racism and all forms of exclusion." The conversation must continue. Onwards!

Best wishes,

Ichiro



SBS SM2 students, Gabrielle Schechter and Marvin So enjoyed some sun outside Kinau Hale State Department of Health on the Big Island during their Winter Session course, SBS 550.

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### Upcoming events

#### Holiday Party

January 28, 4:00-6:00pm

#### The Forum: Race, Criminal Justice and Health

February 6, 12:30-1:30pm

#### HEAL Conference

February 6, 12:30-6:00pm

#### Birthday Celebration

February 24, 12:30-1:30pm

#### MCH/CYF 2015 Symposium

March 30, 8:30am

## Faculty Spotlight: Reginald Tucker-Seeley



**Your research focuses on the relationship between sociodemographic factors and health outcomes / behaviors. What role do you envision your research playing in improving population health?**

My research focuses on two areas. My primary focus is on the measurement and influence of individual financial well-being (FWB) on outcomes across the cancer continuum, from prevention to end-of-life care. The second area is on the measurement and influence of the neighborhood environment on the health and health behavior of residents.

For both areas, a focus on measurement is the starting point. I'm interested in making sure that the construct we think we are measuring (especially related to individual and neighborhood

socioeconomic circumstances) is what we are indeed measuring. I believe that as interventions and policy changes are put forth addressing the social determinants of health that we are very clear about what aspects of the socioeconomic environment we are intervening on.

I envision that my research in this area will continue to highlight the importance of considering the specific aspects of socioeconomic circumstances (beyond education and income) that are associated with health outcomes. My research will also provide useful tools for measuring multiple components of socioeconomic circumstances through the FWB construct in prevention, health services, and social epidemiology research. Lastly, I believe my research will uncover potential material and psychosocial points of intervention in the individual and neighborhood socioeconomic environment.

**I'm curious as to what brought you to your specific field of study – personal background, a meaningful professional experience, an important mentor, or some other form of inspiration/motivation? Could you walk us through your path to finding yourself where you are today?**

I have an undergraduate degree in accounting, and I worked in the accounting and auditing field for about five years. My first job was in the finance department of a managed care company, then I was an internal auditor at Saint Louis University. Though I didn't enjoy working in accounting, I wouldn't trade those years of experience. I then got a masters in counseling and family therapy at Saint Louis University, and completed a one year clinical internship at Washington University in their Student Health and Counseling Service. When considering my background in accounting and mental health, my interest in financial well-being seems rather obvious.

When I began working on the thesis project for my masters in counseling and family therapy, I remember reading several articles by Dr. Norman Anderson that were helpful. I recall looking up where he was at the time and he was a professor in the Department of Health and Social Behavior (HSB). In reviewing the website for the HSB department, I was introduced to a phrase that was

new to me: “social determinants of health.” At that time I felt like I finally had language for what I had been interested in for a long time: understanding how social factors influence our health and behavior. I then applied to several “social science” departments within schools of public health and decided to come to HSPH. I first entered the master’s program in 2002 and then entered the doctoral program in 2004.

**You are offering a Spring course on Measuring and Reporting Health Disparities, which is a new class for this Department. I’m curious as to what compelled you to want to teach this course, and why do you think it’s important for current public health students to take it?**

I’m really excited to teach it. The development of the course was motivated by my experience serving on the Commission for Health Advocacy and Equity in Rhode Island. This commission is charged with writing the state’s health disparities report; and in serving on that commission, I realized that there were several skills and topics that I thought would be really useful to be covered in the SBS department. For example, topics such as the inter-sectoral collaboration necessary to go from the idea of such a report to completion. Through such a process many questions arise such as how do you define a disparity? When is a disparity actionable? If you decide that it is actionable, who is going to act on it? What are the necessary inter-sectoral collaborations needed to act on the noted health disparity? We didn’t have a course in SBS that asked these questions and I was eager to develop a course that provided an opportunity for students to wrestle with this topic and consider the implications in applied settings.

I think sometimes the discussion around health disparities assumes that we all are working with the same definition and we might be here in SBS. However, as our students go out into various communities it is important to consider how the various definitions are applied and used for reporting. Although the course uses a case study focused on the experience at the state level, I think what the students learn can be useful across levels of government from local to federal level efforts on the measuring and reporting of health disparities.

**In your opinion, what are some of the biggest challenges/barriers that stand in the way of our country’s ability to act upon the social determinants of health towards attaining health equity?**

I think we (public health research, practice, and policy) do a much better job of describing and defining health disparities than acting on them. Acting on them – especially using a social determinants of health framework - requires a high level of inter-sectoral collaboration. For example, acting on the social factors that contribute to disparate health outcomes requires multiple agencies/stakeholders to come together to address the problem. Those agencies are likely to have separate budgets and different priorities on different timelines. In order to bring together multiple agencies and fields, I think it’s going to require some creative funding efforts that bring such groups together and sustains such collaborations in the long term. We are starting to see such efforts in the transdisciplinary and translational research communities.

**To close on a more positive note, what is something that you see in the field that’s emerging that gives you hope that we’ll be able to effectively combat inequality in health outcomes?**

Well, the fact that we’re talking about it more, that you hear about the social determinants of health and health disparities. In preparing for my course, my research assistant and I found reports on health disparities across all 50 states (at various levels: state/county). Also the efforts of Commissions like the one in Rhode Island are encouraging. Generally these kinds of groups are filled with members from multiple agencies across the state (e.g. representatives from depts. of transportation, education, and health). It can be a challenge to move projects forward across multiple agencies, but these Commissions exist, and they are at least beginning to talk about how to move beyond just describing health disparities but also making recommendations that hopefully can lead to greater health equity in their respective locations. It is these “on-the-ground” efforts that truly give me hope in our fight for health equity.

*Interview by Marvin So, SM ‘15*

## Research Spotlight: Madina Agénor



**Madina Agénor**, ScD, MPH is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health—Dana-Farber Cancer Institute (DFCI) Educational Program in Cancer Prevention based in the Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences. Dr. Agénor’s research interests pertain to social inequalities in U.S. women’s access to and utilization of sexual and reproductive health and cancer screening and prevention services. Her dissertation, which was supervised by Dr. Nancy Krieger, Professor of Social Epidemiology, used quantitative and qualitative research methods to examine social inequalities in cervical cancer screening among U.S. women by sexual orientation and race/ethnicity. Under the mentorship of Dr. S. Bryn Austin, Associate Professor in the Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Dr. Agénor’s current research focuses on another understudied cancer prevention topic: the relationship between

sexual orientation and human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination among women and girls.

Her first postdoctoral research study used data from the 2006-2010 National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) to examine the association between sexual orientation identity and HPV vaccination among U.S. women and girls aged 15-25 years. Her second study, which also uses 2006-2010 NSFG data, assesses the relationship between another dimension of sexual orientation, sex of sexual partners, and HPV vaccine awareness and initiation among U.S. women and girls. In order to elucidate the factors potentially underlying sexual orientation disparities in HPV vaccine uptake, she is working with Dr. Jennifer Allen, Adjunct Assistant Professor of Social and Behavioral Sciences and Director of the Community Health Program at Tufts University, to conduct focus group discussions with lesbian, bisexual, and queer young adult women in the Boston area. Together, these quantitative and qualitative research findings will help inform programs that promote HPV vaccination among all women and girls – including lesbians, an underserved population at risk of HPV from both female and male sexual partners throughout the life course.

As a Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Dr. Agénor has also established collaborations with other researchers who are committed to addressing cervical cancer prevention inequities in the United States. In partnership with investigators at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, she is identifying the social determinants of cervical cancer screening behavior and abnormal results among black women who have sex with women in the U.S. South, an underserved and understudied population. Moreover, she is collaborating with public health researchers and clinicians at Fenway Health in order to elucidate the barriers to and facilitators of Pap test use among transgender men, another marginalized group. The purpose of this research is to help ensure that no person, regardless of their sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, or gender identity, has to live with or die from cervical cancer – an entirely preventable and treatable disease.

*Photo: Whitney Waddell*

## Community-Building at Landmark: Ester Villalonga-Olives and Claudia Trudel-Fitzgerald



On December 4th, Landmark-based SBS students, researchers and staff enjoyed a community-building event. 15 people attended and enjoyed good food, laughs and great company. These kinds of events will be held every other month to continue meeting and welcoming new students and fellows based at Landmark. The

purpose is mainly social but some business meetings will be scheduled as well. We will keep you posted on upcoming dates!



**Thanks to your feedback, we have set up a wireless printing station in the 403 reception area next to 403Q which is dedicated to students based at Landmark.**

## Student Government Rep: Alina Schnake-Mahl

Quick Update from your SBS Rep:

Last semester we organized a successful Work in Progress Meeting where 2nd year masters students presented some ongoing research to their SBS colleagues. I'll work to schedule several more of these next semester, and hope to have the MD/MPH students and 1st year Masters students present their work as well. I'm also working with faculty and administrators to schedule Student-Faculty Lunch Get-Togethers. Please contact me if you have any suggestions for activities that I can help support!



-Alina ([Asm187@mail.harvard.edu](mailto:Asm187@mail.harvard.edu))

## Announcements

**SBS 219: High Risk Behavior: Epidemiology and Prevention Strategies** taught by Vaughan Rees examines epidemiology of behaviors that place an individual at higher risk of injuries and mortality, including substance abuse, violence, and risky sexual behaviors. Emphasis is placed on developmental and environmental factors that support these behaviors as well as the design, implementation, and review of evidence-based preventive interventions. It meets Tuesdays and Thursdays from 1:30—3:20 in Spring2.

**SBS 513: Measuring and Reporting Health Disparities** is a new course taught by Reginald Tucker-Seeley. The course focuses on measuring and reporting health disparities and health inequity in the United States and meets Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10:30am—12:20 pm in Spring2.

**SBS 514: Reducing Socioeconomic & Racial/Ethnic Inequalities in Health** is a new course taught by David Williams. The course provides an overview of conceptual approaches and empirical evidence for interventions that take a social determinants approach to reduce socioeconomic and racial/ethnic disparities in health status. It meets Thursdays from 3:30—6:20 pm in Spring2.

**Are you graduating in May?** The Career Advancement Office is a great resource for developing your job search strategy, preparing your application materials and developing networking and interviewing skills. To get started, visit: [hsph.harvard.edu/career-services/](https://hsph.harvard.edu/career-services/) or email: [careers@hsph.harvard.edu](mailto:careers@hsph.harvard.edu) Also, check out Appendix E of the [SBS Curriculum Guide](#) for a partial listing of positions taken by SBS alumni and see career updates from some recent graduates below.

## Alumni News

**Madeleine DeBlois**, SD '14 is now a Research Scientist at the Frances McClelland Institute for Children, Youth & Families at the University of Arizona.

**Araceli Gutiérrez**, SM '14 is a Health Graduate Fellow with the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute (CHCI) working closely with the Health Policy Advisor for Congresswoman Lucille Roybal-Allard on various Health related issues and bills.

**Stefanie Pietras**, SM '14 is a health research analyst at Mathematica Policy Research.

**Sarah Simpson**, SM '14 is now a Research Coordinator at Partnerships for Native Health, a program within the Center for Clinical and Epidemiological Research at the University of Washington. She manages the Native People for Cancer Control project.

**Jenna Troup**, SM '14 has been working at RTI International as a Public Health Analyst, in Waltham, MA.

## Awards and Honors

A poster presentation by **Claudia Trudel-Fitzgerald**, Shelley Tworoger, Elizabeth Poole, David Williams and Laura Kubzansky has been selected as one of the 12 noteworthy abstracts submitted at the 1st Integrative Medicine Research Forum, on November 3rd, 2014. Their study investigated the relationship between psychological distress and healthy lifestyle over time among the Nurses' Health Study.

**Katie Cueva**, first year doctoral student, is a co-investigator on a project recently awarded by the National Cancer Institute (R25-CA186882). Over the next five years, Cueva will work with the project team, an advisory panel of Alaska Native elders, and Alaska's Community Health Aides and Practitioners (CHA/Ps) to develop, deliver, and evaluate a culturally respectful online cancer education course for Alaska's CHA/Ps.

**Reginald Tucker-Seeley** was selected for the 2015 AcademyHealth/Aetna Foundation Scholars in Residence Fellowship Program.

Congratulations to the following SBS doctoral students who received [travel awards](#) to present their posters at various conferences last semester: **Kau'i Baumhofer, Ying Chen, Jill Roncarati, Manasi Sharma** and **Li Ying Shen**.

## Shout-out to Gilberto Lopez!



SBS's very own, Gilberto Lopez, (second-year doctoral student) is on a weight-loss journey over the next year to beat obesity through diet and exercise. You can support Gil on his journey by following his blog [Against All Odds](#). Good luck Gil! We are all rooting for you and are here to support you!

## Arrivals and Departures



The Department recently welcomed **Alberta Zoummar** on-board as an Administrative Assistant. Alberta provides administrative support to Ichiro Kawachi and the Grant Management Team. She was previously a bookkeeper and customer service representative at Market Street Gulf. She holds a law degree from Lebanon and a Masters in International Relations from Boston University. Please stop by to introduce yourself if you haven't already met Alberta!



**Stephen Gilman** will depart the School in the Spring for the National Institutes of Health, where he will be appointed Acting Chief of the [Health Behavior Branch](#) in the Division of Intramural Population Health Research at the *Eunice Kennedy Shriver* National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. Stephen looks forward to maintaining his close ties and collaborations with SBS faculty, staff, students, and alumni. Please join us in wishing Stephen the best in his next endeavors!



SBS doctoral student, Kelsey Holt and her husband, Brian, welcomed Charlie Otis Holt to the world on October 12, 2014.

## Events

The **SBS Holiday Party and Toast to the New Year** is on **Wednesday, January 28, 2015** from 4:00–6:00pm in the Kresge Cafeteria. We look forward to seeing those of you who RSVP'd.

**The Forum: Race, Criminal Justice and Health** featuring three SBS expert participants, Felton Earls, *Emeritus*, Nancy Krieger and David Williams is on **February 6, 12:30-1:30pm**.

The **3rd Annual Health Equity and Leadership Conference** will be held on **Friday, February 6, 2015** from 12:30—6:00pm at HMS. Stay tuned for registration information, for conference updates visit the HEAL Facebook page at: <https://www.facebook.com/HEALconference>

The **LGBTQ Conference at Harvard** is on Saturday, **February 7 to Sunday, February 8, 2015**. For more details visit: <http://www.lgbtqconferenceatharvard.org/>

**December/January/February Birthday Celebration!** Please join us for cake and ice cream on **February 24, 2015** in 403Q at Landmark.

The **MCH/CYF 2015 Symposium on Oral Health** will be held on **Monday, March 30<sup>th</sup> 2015 at 8:00 a.m.** Please stay tuned for more information!

**Questions, suggestions, ideas? Email us: [sbs@hsph.harvard.edu](mailto:sbs@hsph.harvard.edu)**

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