



SBS

Social and Behavioral Sciences
HARVARD T.H. CHAN SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

newsletter

SPRING 2, 2015

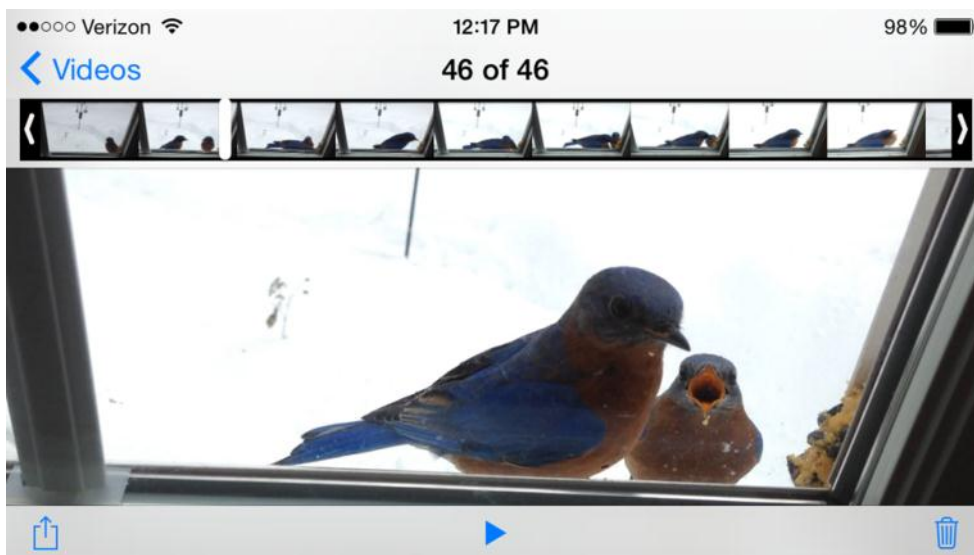
LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Dear SBS community,

A little birdie tells me that “Spring is around the corner”! We have a family of five Eastern Bluebirds which arrived at our birdfeeder in our backyard (note the mounds of snow in the background – that should be hopefully all gone by Commencement).

To our graduating class of students – enjoy your final semester of classes! To our 2nd year doctoral students – take time off from studying for the qualifying exams! I have a couple of good book recommendations to liberate your mind from wading through all the footnotes in *Social Epidemiology (2nd edition)*: Elizabeth Gilbert’s “The Signature of All Things” – one of the best novels I have read about botany and the discovery of evolutionary theory in the 19th century; and Lily King’s “Euphoria”, one of the best books I have read about anthropology, based on a fictionalized account of Margaret Mead’s expedition to Papua New Guinea. Both novels will set your pulse racing and rekindle your passion for science and the wonder of discovery. For everyone else, be sure not to miss the Forum on the future of e-cigarettes coming up on April 16, presented in collaboration with the Center for Global Tobacco Control and Reuters.

Ichiro



Inside this issue

- Student Spotlight.....2-3
- Healthy Lifestyle.....4
- Landmark Update.....5
- SG Update.....5
- Announcements.....6
- Milestones.....6
- Events.....7
- Social Gatherings.....8
- Arrivals.....8

Upcoming events

- Decreasing Tanning Among Students**
March 23, 12:30-1:20pm
- A Doctor of my Own**
March 31, 12:30—1:20pm
- March B-Day Celebration**
March 31, 12:30—1:30pm
- 2015 Cancer Disparities Research Symposium**
April 7, 10:00am—12:15pm
- Student-Faculty Luncheon**
April 10, 12:30-1:30pm
- The Forum: Can E-cigarette Regulation Protect the Public’s Health? Making Sense of the Science**
April 16, 12:30-1:30pm
- Different Lenses, One Vision**
April 20—23

Student Spotlight: Yulin Hswen



Tell us about your background. What led you here?

I hail from the Great White North, well Vancouver, Canada to be specific. I completed my Bachelor's degree at the University of British Columbia where I studied cell biology and genetics, and minored in Theatre. My specific interests were in the field of epigenetics, focusing on how the environment can manipulate an individual's gene expression.

However, I started working as a mentor for Big Sisters and I also worked on a Canadian Native Reservation, and it was through these experiences that I came to realize that discrimination and social disparities were generating the worst health outcomes in the country. At that point I decided to shift my focus on understanding and eliminating health disparities. I was drawn to the Harvard T.H.

Chan School of Public Health because it has the world's top experts in the field of social epidemiology, who are all determined to find new solutions and develop interventions to improve the health across all populations, especially those who are most underserved and marginalized.

How have you found the courses in the SD program thus far? Stimulating? Challenging?

Epidemiology 201 and 202 have been the most challenging courses for me. Entering into the program, I had been warned that the Epidemiology courses at Harvard were unlike any Epidemiology courses at other schools of Public Health. My classmates and I are in agreement on this; the Epidemiology courses are challenging. In general, all of the courses at Harvard really go into depth on each subject, but I would say the Epidemiology courses just take it to a whole other level.

Also the professors are amazing, they make themselves available to answer any questions, and most importantly they are truly passionate about what they are teaching. I also have to say that one of the best things about all of the courses at Harvard is the amazing Teaching Assistants. They are experts in the material and they are really devoted to their students. I think the labs and office hours with the TAs are where students can learn the most. The TAs are supportive and they are really invested in having students understand the material. Many challenges can be surmounted because of TAs who spend the extra time answering last minute panic emails or who stay behind late to make sure you understand the concept correctly. I have seen that this is really across all departments. I cannot say enough about my TAs, who are also my fellow classmates.

Now that you've become acclimated to the program, what are you enjoying the most?

The two things I enjoy most are my fellow classmates and meeting with my advisor. Yes, the students at Harvard are brilliant but more than that they are people who are really committed to what they are studying and to improving the health of those who are most vulnerable. This makes them

good people to hangout with, and to eat lunch with. And then, of course, I really enjoy the meetings with my advisor, Professor Viswanath. Well, every time I leave my meetings I think “everything is going to be OK because there are people like him around who are making the world a better place.” The insight and investment in my success both academically and professionally that my advisor provides are the main reasons I came to Harvard.

Tell us about your work in Health Communications.

I firmly believe that it should not be the case that burden of disease is disproportionately higher among marginalized groups. Health communication is an important and innovative approach that can be used to reduce mortality and morbidity by promoting positive health behavior change. But, what I specifically examine is how the unequal distribution of knowledge among socially marginalized groups actually contributes to the poorer health outcomes experienced by these groups. My advisor’s lab, The Viswanath Lab, focuses on identifying the unequal distribution of knowledge of risk information and seeks to determine effective ways to promote fair and equal distribution of health communication among socially marginalized populations. Evidence shows that social factors such as sex, gender, income, education and race influence health communication behaviors, but it is unclear how

different groups interpret health information. Our research team examines differences in information uptake by exploring the impact of these social factors on the adoption of health related behaviors that are promoted through different health communication messages. For instance, I am currently working on Project CLEAR, which is funded by the FDA. In this project we are examining the effects of graphic health warning labels on cigarette packages on vulnerable populations groups. We are looking to identify which elements of the design of the health communication messages, such as color, the style of the text, or the types of photos used, that influence the adoption of smoking related behaviors. One of our goals is to ensure that health communication messages reach diverse demographic groups and are relevant and meaningful to these individuals.

What I am most passionate about is The Viswanath Lab’s ultimate goal, which is to reduce social injustices in health knowledge and distribution of disease.

What would you tell prospective doctoral students interested in the SD in Social and Behavioral Sciences?

Come. It’s worth it. Period.

Interview by Elizabeth Solomon and Whitney Waddell

Congratulations to Emily Kroshus



Congratulations to Emily Kroshus and STRIPED for their newest teaching case, [“Weighing the Evidence: One University Takes a Hard Look at Disordered Eating Among Athletes.”](http://goo.gl/4bMwiJ) which is being promoted by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) through their national network of college athletics professionals. Read more here: <http://goo.gl/4bMwiJ>

Healthy Lifestyle Feature: Loretta Alamo



Loretta on Block Island, RI

Tell us about yourself.

I have been working at the School of Public Health for 29 years. I commute to work via the commuter rail and sit on the train for at least two hours a day. I have met many friends this way! I am married, have one daughter who is engaged (we are looking forward to a June 2016 wedding). I have two adult step-children and two grand-daughters. I am involved with my local church community and I am a team member for The American Cancer Society Relay for Life. I enjoy spending time with my family (especially my grandchildren) and friends. I always feel my best when I'm helping someone out and taking care of my own health.

How do you stay active and healthy while putting in 40+ hours at the office?

I stay active by walking to work from Back Bay in the morning and back again in the evening to catch my commuter rail train (so long as the temperature is not in the single digits). I bundle up and once I am moving at a good pace I don't feel the cold as much. I also work out in the evening at home most nights (I have a mini gym in my basement). I normally have a light snack on the train to tide me over and immediately put on my workout clothes when I get home to motivate me to get my workout done first. Then I have a light dinner. I also try to get to bed early to get my rest.

In what ways has working in the SBS Department helped you develop a healthy lifestyle?

By working in SBS I see all the research that is being conducted to prevent illnesses and take better care of ourselves. After being a smoker for many years, I quit smoking 12 years ago which was very difficult but very rewarding. I want to maintain a healthy lifestyle so I try to eat 5 a day (fruit/veggies) to prevent cancer and improve cardio vascular health. I try to avoid being over-weight by making better food choices and incorporating physical activity daily. I try to get as much sleep as I can so I have good energy in the morning. I have also cut back on my caffeine intake and sugary drinks. I drink lots of water!

What are you most looking forward to as the weather warms up?

I'm looking forward to Spring so I can get outside on my bicycle, jog, walk and enjoy the nice weather.

Name four behavior change tips you would like to share with others who want to lead healthier lives.

If you smoke, please don't give up trying to quit – it took me at least five attempts before I finally did it! When you are in the sun, apply sunscreen and don't use tanning beds! Physical activity is important, so don't forget to take care of yourself and book your calendar for exercise time. Ask yourself, do I really need to eat that?

Interview by Whitney Waddell

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

Landmark fellows gathered on February 18th for a research-friendly activity, for socializing and learning more about the exciting projects that are ongoing at the School. Rie Sakai Bizmark, postdoc with Dr. Kawachi, gave an interesting talk about the role of school social capital on smoking behaviors among adolescents. It was a great opportunity to



practice a future job interview, as we discussed several theoretical and methodological issues related to this type of study. Fellows (who are not all pictured unfortunately!) shared their thoughts based on their own area of expertise, which made the activity highly rewarding, in addition to being another way to get to know each other! Ester and Claudia are planning a social happy hour in March and another research meeting in April - stay tuned!

Student Government Rep: Alina Schnake-Mahl

Please mark your calendars for the SBS Spring Student-Faculty Lunch Mixer on **Friday, April 10, 2015** from **12:30—1:30pm** on the 6th floor. This will be a great opportunity to socialize with faculty and other students and grow our SBS community. A light lunch will be served. An invitation was sent out. Please RSVP by March 27.



Announcements

Casey Daniel will be presenting an abstract “Advancing Survivors’ Knowledge (ASK) About Skin Cancer Study: A Randomized Intervention within the Childhood Cancer Survivor Study (CCSS)” at the New England Cancer Survivorship Research Symposium on April 2, 2015. The event is being held at the Joseph B. Martin Conference Center at Harvard Medical School. To register visit <http://goo.gl/Ai7i2Q>

Katie Giles, Program Manager for OSNAP (Out of School Time Nutrition and Physical Activity Initiative) recently contributed as a guest blogger to Afterschool Snack, a blog of the organization Afterschool Alliance to promote OSNAP’s research-tested tools and resources to promote nutrition and physical activity in afterschool programs. Read the post here: <http://goo.gl/6ucV9z>

Yulin Hswen and her group, Clear Breath, is one of the top 10 finalists for the President's Challenge at the i-Lab. Read the announcement here: <http://goo.gl/Lsx15P>

David Hurtado accepted the position of Assistant Professor, Occupational Health Sciences at Oregon Health & Science University.

Natasha Sokol was recently awarded an F-31 from the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

Andy Tan was selected for the National Cancer Institute-funded 2015 Cancer Research Network Scholars Program.

Staff Milestones

The following SBS faculty and staff were honored at this year’s Celebration with the Stars. Please join us in commending them for their service!

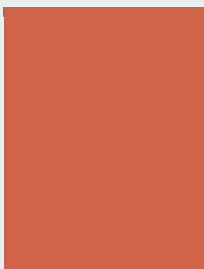
Alan Geller
5 years



Rebekka Lee
10 years



Rima Rudd
25 years



Robyn Keske
5 years



Vaughan Rees
10 years



Events

College campuses often boast many “amenities” for students; however, not all “amenities” are safe. On **March 23, 2015 from 12:30—1:20pm**, **Rachel Rodgers, PhD**, associate professor in the Department of Counseling and Applied Educational Psychology at Northeastern University, will be presenting, “**Decreasing Tanning Among Students: An Unexpected Minimal Intervention**” in FXB -G11. This talk will expose the pervasive and toxic U.V. tanning industry, its hold on college campuses, and how minimal interventions may be effective in decreasing tanning behaviors among female students. This talk is sponsored by STRIPED and Advancing Survivors’ Knowledge (ASK) About Skin Cancer.



Africa Health Forum will present a screening of **A Doctor of my Own: The First Medical Students of Namibia** on **Tuesday, March 31 from 12:30-1:20pm** in FXB G12. This new global health documentary film features Dean Julio Frenk. Lunch will be provided.

2015 Cancer Disparities Research Symposium, with guest speaker Dr. Francesca Gany, MD, MS “Using an Integrated Approach to Address Immigrant Cancer Disparities” will be held on **Tuesday, April 7, 2015. Lecture: 10:00am – 11:00am** at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute Yawkey 306/307 **Optional Breakout Groups: 11:15am -12:15pm** To register for this free event: <http://events.dfhcc.harvard.edu/events/70> For more information: audrey_kalisz@dfci.harvard.edu



The Forum: Can E-cigarette Regulation Protect the Public’s Health? Making Sense of the Science, presented in collaboration with Center for Global Tobacco Control, and featuring expert participants, Howard Koh, Vaughan Rees, Kenneth Warner, Vish Viswanath and David Hammond will take place on **Thursday, April 16, 2015, 12:30-1:30pm**. Watch at: ForumHSPH.org

Different Lenses, One Vision, a series of events being held **April 20th - 23rd** is aimed at discussing the experiences of marginalized populations in the United States. Themes include race and ethnicity, gender and sexuality, weight stigma, and mental and physical disabilities/differences. Stay tuned for more details regarding registration, speakers, times, and locations. This series is organized by Student Government, in collaboration with other student organizations and sponsored by the Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences. Questions? Email: Morgan.Shields@mail.harvard.edu.



Social Gatherings



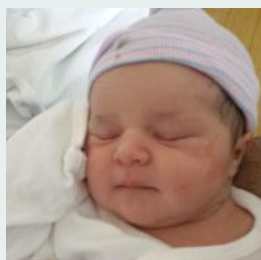
On February 23, 2015, 30 students, faculty, and staff gathered to bid farewell to **Stephen Gilman**, Associate Professor of Social and Behavioral Sciences. Stephen will depart the School this Spring to serve as acting chief of the Health Behavior Branch (HBB) of the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD).



Among those who celebrated winter birthdays at our celebration on February 24, 2015 were (pictured left to right) **Stephen Hafner, SD '17**, **Rima Rudd**, **Armand Inezian** and **Shaniece Criss, SD '15**.

The next SBS Birthday Celebration will be held, **March 31, from 12:30—1:30pm** at Landmark.

Arrivals



Alfredo Perez-Hidalgo and his wife Adriana welcomed a baby girl, Laura, on March 13, 2015. She weighed 8.1 lbs and is a happy and healthy baby!

Questions, suggestions, ideas? Email us: sbs@hsph.harvard.edu

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