Alumna Profile
Rebecca Merrill, PhD ’10, MHS ’07

MSPH students learn a lesson from “Apollo 13”

Student Scholarships and Awards
Faculty Honors

Centennial Celebrations

ADVANCING DIGITAL HEALTH SCIENCE AND PRACTICE

Data for Health begins work on mobile phone surveys
From the Chair

2016 marks the School’s centennial year. To celebrate, we welcomed back several esteemed alumni and former faculty to address the School. Their insights have helped us reflect on the past, prepare for the future and honor those who have had monumental impacts on global public health.

Alumnus Abdul Ghaffar, executive director of the Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research at the World Health Organization, addressed the School on the future of global health. Abdul Ghaffar spoke about his experience working with Ministries of Health across the world and the importance of preparing public health professionals to confront health systems challenges. The seminar also honored Dr. Ghaffar’s mentor, Professor William Reinkes, a pioneer in the use of operations research in public health.

Alumna Karabi Acharya, director of Global Ideas for US Solutions at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, addressed the master’s students in the program for Social and Behavioral Interventions and the program in Global Disease Epidemiology and Control. Dr. Acharya challenged students to think about underlying structures, assumptions, and systems to help improve programs and policies affecting public health.

We also welcomed back emeritus professor and founding director of the Department’s Center for Human Nutrition, Dr. Benjamin Caballero. He presented findings from over 20 years working on blindness, weight fluctuation, and chronic disease in Cuba.

Alumna Olusoji O. Adeyi, director of Global Practice, Health, Nutrition & Population at the World Bank, presented a panel co-hosted by the Department and the African Public Health Network. The panel discussed the implications of the UN Sustainable Development Goals on public health in Africa.

In October 2015, we celebrated brothers Brad and Dave Sack, whose vision and scientific achievement have made them legends in the field of diarrheal disease research. Faculty, students, alumni and distinguished guests gathered for a day-long event that included scientific sessions in fields related to the brothers’ work. By looking at past achievements and challenges that he faced, these events provided a perfect backdrop for the launch of the Department’s new research strategy. The strategy will help focus our resources and work toward our mission of finding sustainable solutions to improve the health of disadvantaged people around the world. One new initiative that it has generated is the Faculty Innovation Fund small grants program. In the first round, Amanda Debes won a grant to test an intervention that reduces the number of childhood diarrheal episodes that children experience. The award provides seed money to advance ideas that might not qualify for typical peer-reviewed grants.

The Department will host a celebration of her life on Saturday, May 21 at 1 p.m. at the home of her advisor, Dr. Caitlin Kennedy. Please contact Cristina Salazar (csalazar@jhu.edu) for more details.

Summer 2016

3 Alumna Profile
Rebecca Merrill, PhD ’10, MHS ’07
Senior Epidemiologist, CDC

Merrill talks about why she’s attending a counter-terrorism training camp and about a new study that builds on her doctoral work. She also gives some advice to current and future students.

6 Advancing Digital Health
Science and Practice
Johns Hopkins Global mHealth Initiative (JH-I-GmH) produces three of its first kind publications.

7 Centennial Seminars
Special alumni speakers:
Abdul Ghaffar, MD PhD MIH MPH
Karabi Acharya, ScD ‘93, MHS ‘87

8 News & Highlights
Student Scholarships and Awards
Krause Awards in Human Nutrition
Faculty Honors and Awards

12 MSPH Students Learn a Lesson from ‘Apollo 13’
Students learn how to develop standard operating procedures with limited resources in weekly seminar.

In Memoriam
Azal Ahmad

It is with a heavy heart that we share the sad news of the passing of Azal Ahmad, a doctoral student in our Social and Behavioral Interventions Program. Those of us who knew Azal well treasured her friendship, while many others enjoyed having her as a caring, smart and committed student and colleague. She received her BA in Philosophy from Wellesley College and her master’s in Medical Anthropology from the University of Oxford. Her dissertation research was focused on migrant female sex workers living with HIV in Senegal. She will be truly missed by her family, friends, and colleagues. The Department will host a celebration of her life on Saturday, May 21 at 1 p.m. at the home of her advisor, Dr. Caitlin Kennedy. Please contact Cristina Salazar (csalazar@jhu.edu) for more details.

I recently spoke to alumna Becky Merrill, PhD ’10 MHS ’07, during a break in her counter-terrorist training at a Homeland Security base in Georgia. She’d just finished crashing a car into another vehicle as part of a defensive driving course. “It’s like Driver’s Ed times 100,” she says with a laugh. I ask whether she’s with the CDC or the CIA. She explains that all US government employees stationed abroad longer than 45 days in a calendar year must take the training. She jokes, “I think the CDCers here are the only ones who don’t have a security detail or aren’t part of one.”

Merrill is a senior epidemiologist for the International Border Team at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)—focusing much of her time supporting the Global Health Security Agenda. She re- ceived both her master’s and doctoral degrees from the Department’s Program in Human Nutrition. I called her to discuss a recent study whose findings confirmed innovative research she began as a student in the Department.

Merrill’s research was some of the first to link high levels of iron in ground water with iron status in women. Iron deficiency is considered to be the most common cause of anemia and, consequently, iron supplementation programs are used to combat the condition. Evidence has been mounting, however, that iron deficiency is not as prevalent in Bangladesh as assumed, in large part due to high levels of iron in the ground water there. Earlier this year, a national-level study also found little evidence of iron deficiency, but widespread anemia. It also found a link between geographic areas with elevated iron in ground water and improved iron status in the population. “Becky’s doctoral work was ground breaking,” Professor Keith West, director of the Department’s Human Nutrition Program told me earlier. West first brought the new study to my attention. “It’s a great example of how our students’ research can instill new insights and spur further research on a public health problem,” West continued. He briefly explained Merrill’s early research and touched on the importance of this new study. During our conversation, Merrill and I discussed the study and her own research. I also took the opportunity to speak with several advice for students and recent graduates who are starting their global health careers.

Why did you decide to look at iron levels in ground water? Anemia is prevalent in Bangladesh. Studies, however, were showing mixed results on the effectiveness of iron supplementation to combat it. I was initially interested in the effects of arsenic on maternal and child health outcomes. Arsenic-poisoned water was a major problem in Bangladesh. The country’s underground water naturally contains high levels of it. As a result, the water supply had been extensively documented to try to pinpoint where levels were most dangerous. But the documentation also included information on other elements, including iron. I noticed that iron levels were high in the Hopkins’ research site—one of the places where iron status wasn’t as low as anticipated. I thought it was possible that women were getting sufficient iron from the water and that anemia was being caused by something other than iron deficiency.

Were you aware of the new study that confirmed many of your findings? Yes. The lead researchers are based at icddr,b, a well-respected research hospital in Dhaka that Hopkins has partnered with for years. The two organizations have a great collaborative relationship, and they were familiar with me from my 5 years living in Bangladesh as I worked with Hopkins and the research site. The authors consulted with me several times and sent me a copy of the article before it was public.
What are the implications of these new findings? This national level information provides further evi-
dence that environmental factors need to be considered in nutrition programming. A WHO working group is currently revising global guidelines for iron assessment in populations. The group asked me to conduct one of 5 sys-
tematic reviews to inform the guidelines development group. Environmental fac-
tors were definitely part of my review and also part of the group’s discussion. The new guidelines should be coming out later this year.

Are you still working on similar issues at the CDC? I’m now a senior epidemiologist for the International Border Team. It’s a brand new team within the Division of Global Migration and Quarantine. We help build na-
tional capacity to meet the core capacities of the Inter-
national Health Regulations along long land borders and major points of entry. Our goal is to strengthen public health systems, such as surveillance and re-
source, and build essential infrastructure. In the past, efforts have focused on nation-based capacity building. But populations are not static. As the recent Ebola cri-
sis illustrates, there’s an increasing need for countries to share information across borders. My team works with ministries of health to help build relationships between neighboring countries towards public health collabora-
tion and coordination.

How did you go from nutrition to health systems and disease surveillance? In July of 2014, towards the middle of my two-year term with the Epidemic Intelligence Service, a call went out across the CDC for Peace Corps returnees to support the Ebola epidemic. This call highlighted that those who de-
ployed must be com-
developed to travel to rural areas alone be-
cause there was no CDC office or perma-
nent team in place. I spent 2 years in Banga-
ladesh as a Peace Corps volunteer and was interested in put-
ing my skills and ex-
periences to support the response. The day

before I departed for a month in Liberia, the Ebola cri-
sis was officially declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern by the WHO. During that expe-
rience I was able to apply the skills in surveillance and data management I learned through my time with Hopkins and the research site in Bangladesh to support Liberia’s efforts. Additionally, I became more interested in how migration between countries in-
creased disease transmission.

The new International Borders Team was looking for someone with strong data management skills. Fortunately, I received a comprehensive under-
standing of the many parts of public health from my work at Hopkins, specifically with the JIVaT Project where I did my doctoral and postdoctoral research. The project has a vast infrastructure, and its commit-
tment to collecting quality data is unrivaled. While the research focuses on nutrition, a strong skill set is needed in data collection and can be applied to any sub-
ject, anywhere.

The Department has a health systems strengthening project in Liberia. Do you ever work with Hopkins people in Liberia? Yes, I work with Hopkins people almost everywhere I go. Tashrik Ahmed, a doctoral student in International Health, is part of that Hopkins project and he’s based in Liberia. Tashrik’s a great resource. We’ve met several times to talk about how to promote data sharing. The new guidelines should be coming out later this year.

Any advice for students? Two things. First, young researchers should learn the complexities of how data is collected, how data is pro-
cessed and managed, and how data is analyzed and in-
terpreted to improve public health. Often times primar-

y field work is the hardest to incorporate into a degree program because of the time required. Going to a field site for at least a month will help them understand it better. This time can help you realize what skills you’re missing and what you need to start learning. For ex-

ample, I still remember that one of my favorite classes was a four-hour course in data management. We learned how to make a data management system, including a digital form for data collection. I have used these skills routinely throughout my career.

Collecting public health data accurately, faster and more efficiently with mobile phone surveys

International Health (IH) faculty and students are working with govern-
ment officials and technical experts across the globe to de-
velop new ways of collecting non-communicable disease (NCD) data. Led by Professor Adnan Hyder, the Health Systems program director, the Hopkins team collaborates with colleagues at the Cen-
ters for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the CDC Foun-
dation and the World Health Organization. Together, they’re de-
veloping first-of-their-kind systems and guidelines for conducting NCD mobile phone surveys. Still in the early stages, the team is co-
mediates data collection, and management can be applied to any subject, anywhere.

A strong skill set in data collection and management can be applied to any subject, anywhere.

Reference Publications

New national study on ground water and iron status led by scd-

Selected articles by Merrill


New publications that will advance digital health science and practice

Johns Hopkins Global mHealth Initiative (JHU-GmI) produces three first-of-their-kind publications

JHU-GmI coordinates with faculty and students from across the university to help mobilize the University’s digital health resources. Led by the Department’s Alain Labrique, an associate professor in the Global Disease Epidemiology and Control program, the Initiative’s overarching goal is to develop and test appropriate and effective digital health strategies, while strengthening the evidence base. The absence of a shared vocabulary or common framework to describe clinical or health system innovations which use mobile technologies was a significant problem for researchers and policy makers interested in digital health.

In 2013, Labrique and colleagues published one of the first mHealth frameworks. It laid out 12 common mHealth strategies used as “ingredients” in health systems—strengthening innovations across the reproductive health continuum. The framework helps individual projects describe their innovation and approach using a common framework to policymakers, donors and colleagues working in this space. In addition, it has been adopted by WHO and Unicef as a standard way of describing digital health investments recommended to governments. Published by Global Health: Science and Practice, the article is currently the journal’s most downloaded article, with over 30,000 downloads and 65 citations.

Over the last year, both faculty and students affiliated with GmI have produced new works that should also have wide-ranging and lasting impacts on the field. The new guidelines, toolkit and landscape review address mHealth programming from conception to implementation to evaluation. Labrique sums it up:

We are thrilled that the work we’ve been doing in digital health with a range of partners, from WHO to ministries of health, has been appreciated for its rigor and innovation. Hopkins has a long history of bringing systematic thinking to the table, which we’re proud to bring to the digital health conversation.

mHealth Evaluation, Reporting and Assessment (mERA) guidelines—First of their kind

Over the past decade, the global “mobile phone” revolution has inspired 1,000s of global health innovation projects. Clinicians and public health practitioners have been working with NGOs and governments to leverage the ubiquity of phones and connectivity across once-remote, rural populations as a way of overcoming barriers to scale-up programs and to resolve process bottlenecks. A major obstacle in the way of widespread adoption of these “mHealth” innovations, at scale, has been the absence of guidelines from normative bodies like WHO. This stems, partly, from the lack of quality reporting to provide an evidence-base of the mHealth work which is being done around the world.

The mHealth Evaluation, Reporting and Assessment (mERA) guidelines represent the FIRST step in this direction—as WHO commissioned a team, including researchers from Johns Hopkins Global mHealth Initiative and the WHO/HRP mHealth Technical Evidence Group (mTERG)—to develop standard criteria for reporting research and innovation findings.

Guidelines for reporting of health interventions using mobile phones: mobile health (mHealth) evidence reporting and assessment (mERA) was written by Smisha Agarwal, Amnesty E LeFevre, Jaime Lee, Kelly L’Engle, Garrett Mehld, Chalita Sinha, and Alain Labrique, with contributions from the WHO mHealth Technical Evidence Review Group. It was published in the March 19 issue of the British Medical Journal.

Mobile Technology in Support of Frontline Health Workers—A comprehensive overview of the landscape, knowledge gaps and future directions

A GmI team, led by International Health faculty Smisha Agarwal and Alain Labrique, with support of students and faculty across the University produced this report commissioned by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. It summarizes global trends in the use of digital tools by frontline health workers in low- and middle-income countries around the world. Many developing countries have ramped up the adoption of mobile technologies, such as tablets and smartphones, as an important resource for frontline health workers. Although numerous projects have been developed over the past decade, few have made it to national or regional scale—and the key “ingredients” for success are poorly understood. This report summarizes current data from over 140 projects, while describing emerging trends and best practices to help governments and implementing agencies consider various successes and failures, and weigh the benefits of different platforms and digital strategies. The Foundation and its partners plan to use this report and the comprehensive database created to support it to make strategic decisions in the coming months. Report authors: Smisha Agarwal, Leona Rosenblum, Tamara Goldschmidt, Michelle Carras, Neha Goel, and Alain B. Labrique.

Health Assessment and Planning for Scale (MAPS)

Not your ordinary toolkit

One of the main criticisms of digital health in recent years has been the failure to scale many of the exciting pilot projects developed around the world. In response to this frustration, the World Health Organization, the United Nations Foundation and GmI worked together to develop a toolkit for program implementers and policymakers—designed to assess and plan digital projects for scale. The MAPS Toolkit is a comprehensive self-assessment and planning guide for projects seeking to scale up and achieve long-term sustainability of their mHealth solutions.

The Toolkit provides a series of six self-assessment scorecards, spanning domains considered to be essential to the scalability and growth potential of a digital health program. From the scientific groundwork and human resource capacity to financial health and technology architecture, the Toolkit is built to provide a quantitative “score” for project managers, identifying areas which may need strengthening to maximize the probability of scale. The criteria were developed based on extensive fieldwork and feedback from dozens of programs around the world.

Twelve Common mHealth and Information and Communications Technology Applications. Source: Global Health: Science and Practice. "mHealth innovations as health system strengthening tools: 12 common applications and a visual framework,” by Alain B Labrique, Lavanya Vasudevan, Erica Kochi, Robert Fabricant, Garrett Mehld.

For more, visit: www.jhunmhealth.org

JHSPH Centennial Seminars in International Health

In February, the Department hosted a series of seminars to celebrate the centennial of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. We were honored to welcome home two of our esteemed alumni: Abdulf Ghaffar, MD, PhD ’01, MPH, Executive Director, Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research, WHO, and Karabi Acharya, ScD ’93, MHS ’87, Director, Global Ideas for US Solutions, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Dr. Ghaffar spoke about the future of global health systems and the importance of preparing public health professionals to confront health systems challenges. Dr. Acharya discussed how we can build a culture of health by thinking globally and looking at underlying structures and systems. Visit www.jhsphs.edu/InternationalHealth to see all the International Health Centennial seminars.
Student Awards and Scholarships

Baker, Reinke, Taylor Scholarship in International Health

Daniel Erchick, Global Disease Epidemiology and Control (GDEC)
Agneszka Lubon, Health Systems
Spiker Marie, Human Nutrition

Established in 2004, this scholarship commemorates over 100 combined years of dedicated public health service by Drs. Timothy D. Baker, William Reinke and Carl E. Taylor. The efforts of these three men were instrumental in establishing the field of international health as a distinct discipline. This fund supports graduate students in the Department of International Health and is targeted toward students working in the following areas: organization of health delivery systems, community-based healthcare or injury control in less developed countries.

Procter & Gamble Fellowships

Laura Beres, Social and Behavioral Interventions (SBI)
Daniel Erchick, GDEC
Jessica Rothstein, SBI

Established by Procter & Gamble in 2003, this fund supports master's, doctoral and post-doctoral students committed to advancing the health and well-being of women and children through the provision of clean water and improved nutrition.

Clements – Mann Fellowship

Andrea Carcalen, GDEC
Wangeci Kagucia, GDEC

Mary Lou Clements-Mann, MD, MPH ’79, professor of International Health, and her husband Jonathan Mann, MD, MPH, visiting professor of Health Policy and Management, died in September 1998 when Swiss Air Flight 111 to Geneva crashed into the North Atlantic. The Manns were at the forefront of the worldwide struggle against AIDS. Dr. Clements-Mann was an internationally known physician who devoted most of her career to developing and testing vaccines to combat respiratory viruses, AIDS, and diarrheal diseases. She was the founding director of the Center for Immunization Research, where she worked with colleagues to develop the master's and doctoral programs in vaccine sciences. Dr. Jonathan Mann founded the WHO’s AIDS program and was one of the first scientists to bring the international AIDS crisis to the world’s attention. The Clements-Mann Fellowship was established by family members, friends, and colleagues as a tribute to Mary Lou and Jonathan’s tireless devotion to vaccine development, research, and human rights. The fund supports outstanding graduate students working in vaccine sciences.

Humanitarian Assistance Award

Shirley Ho, Health Systems
Samira Sami, DrPH program

This fund provides support to master's and doctoral students who are committed to improving humanitarian response and health for refugees, displaced persons and populations affected by conflict and natural disasters.

Robert & Helen Wright Fund

Laura Beres, SBI
Emily Carter, SBI

Created in 1983 with donations from family members and friends of former International Health faculty member Robert Wright, MD, MPH ’40. The Fund provides support for continuing doctoral students who expect to contribute to the improvement of public health in Africa, particularly in Nigeria.

Diana Hess Scholarship

Alex Moran, GDEC

In 1983 the Diana Hess Memorial Fund was established with contributions from her family and friends. Diana Hess, a former Peace Corps volunteer in Kenya, was devoted to improving public health in Africa. The Hess Fund provides annual scholarships to students in the Department of International Health. Preference is given to those planning to work in Africa.

The R. Bradley Sack Family Scholarship

Saba Rouhani, GDEC

Established in 2000 by R. Bradley Sack, MS, MD, ScD ’68, the award supports outstanding doctoral students studying infectious disease in the developing world. Dr. Sack has served on the faculty at the School for over 40 years and consulted and worked all over the world on problems related to infectious diseases.

The David and Elinor Bodian Scholarship

Georgeda Buchbinder, GDEC

This fellowship was established in 1996 with a bequest from the estate of Elsa Orent Keiles, a bequest from the estate of Elsa Orent Keiles, ScD ’25, a graduate of the Department of Chemical Hygiene (now Biochemistry and Molecular Biology). In keeping with Dr. Keiles’ research interests, the award provides fellowship support for graduate students with demonstrated financial needs in the Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology or the Program in Human Nutrition in the Department of International Health.

The Elsa Orent Keiles Fellowship in Human Nutrition in International Health

Julie Ruel-Bergeron, Human Nutrition

This fellowship was established in 1999 with a bequest from the estate of Elsa Orent Keiles, ScD ’25. This fund provides annual support to a doctoral student at the School whose dissertation research is at a critical juncture.

Henry & Lola Beye Award

Mariana Socal, Health Systems

This fund was established in 2001 through the estate of Lola Beye, widow of Henry Beye, MD. Dr. Beye received his MPH degree from the School in 1942 and was an authority on tropical diseases. He spent many years at the US Public Health Service where he was the director of the Middle America Research Unit. He conducted intensive studies on elephantiasis, hemorrhagic fever, filariasis, and schistosomiasis, and during his career worked in such countries as Bolivia, British Guiana, Thailand, and Panama. Mrs. Beye, a nurse, often worked in the field with Dr. Beye. This fund supports an outstanding student who has completed a medical degree and is pursuing a graduate degree in the Department.

Georgeda Buchbinder Award

Erin Hunter, SBI

Dr. Georgeda Buchbinder received her MPH from the School in 1984. She then moved to Hawaii and began a public health career by teaching Population Science and International Health. Her career was progressing extraordinarily well when she was diagnosed with cancer. This fund was established by friends and colleagues after her death to celebrate her all-too-brief career in public health. This fund annually supports students, junior faculty, or other priority projects in international health.

The Elsa Orent Keiles Fellowship in Human Nutrition in International Health

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Robert Black, MD, MPH, professor, GDEC, received the 2016 Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter Humanitarian Award from the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases. The award recognizes his contributions as a world-leading public health scientist and his lifetime contribution to improving the health of children in the developing world.

Joanne Katz, ScD ’93, MS, professor and associate chair, Academic Programs, was inducted into the Maryland Women’s Hall of Fame. She was recognized for her work to improve the health of women and children in low- and middle-income countries.

Alison Barlow, PhD, MPH ’97, MA, associate scientist, SBI, officially took over the reins from Professor Mathu Santosham as the director of the Center for American Indian Health.

Mathuram Santosham, MD, MPH ’75, professor, Health Systems, stepped down as the director of the Center for American Indian Health, which he founded 25 years ago. Hundreds of friends, colleagues, and former students joined him at Hopkins to honor and celebrate his career that has been devoted to improving the lives of disadvantaged people all over the world. “Mathu’s work has helped saved millions of children’s lives worldwide,” says new Center Director Allison Barlow. “What’s more, he is an expert at working with communities to discover ways to improve health. We celebrate that he will remain a senior advisor to the Center as he moves into a Director Emeritus position.”

Mary and Carl Taylor Fund
Afsan Bhadelia, Health Systems

The Mary and Carl Taylor Fund was created in 1995 with contributions from faculty and alumni in honor of the Taylors’ commitment to the students of the School of Public Health and to improving international health through research and action. The fund provides support to a student working in the area of international bioethics.

The Prize was established in honor of Richard H. Morrow, MD, who was a pioneer in the field of health systems and international public health, is reminiscent for his brilliance, curiosity, humility, humor, generosity, grace, and above all, his integrity.

Richard Morrow Award
Katharine Shelley, Health Systems

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Student Awards and Scholarships
Alison Snow Jones Memorial Prize
Katharine Shelley, Health Systems

The Prize was established in honor of Alison Snow Jones, former faculty member and alumna, who passed away in January 2011. It is awarded to an outstanding student with work in the following areas: health economics, the intersection between ethics and health economics, intimate partner violence, and women’s health.

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What the Movie “Apollo 13” Taught MSPH Students in the Global Disease Epidemiology and Control Program

Students learn how to develop standard operating procedures with limited resources in weekly seminar

Pablo Yori, a senior research associate in the Department, recently re-watched the movie “Apollo 13.” When he came to the pivotal scene where the astronauts needed to replace the capsule’s air filter to survive, he was reminded of what it can be like conducting research in the field. The filter on board was square, but the filter receptacle was round. Engineers on the ground had to figure out how to fit the square filter in the round hole, and quickly explain it to the astronauts. “We don’t have to worry about running out of oxygen, but the scenario made me think about many of the issues we face regularly in International Health. When unexpected problems arise, we often have limited time and resources to solve them. And sometimes, we can’t work on the problems in person,” explains Yori. “I wanted to find a way for students to experience that kind of pressure in the classroom before they ever met it in the field.”

Yori and Karen Charron, an associate lecturer in the Department, run the weekly master’s seminar for the Global Disease Epidemiology and Control program. With teaching assistance from doctoral student Josh Colston, they introduce first-year master’s students to a wide range of topics important to global health research and practice. One critical component for conducting research is developing standard operating procedures (SOP)—or step-by-step instructions that can be reproduced. The “Apollo 13” scene gave Yori an idea for an exercise to teach some important lessons for developing an SOP, including functionality, feasibility and the ability to replicate.

First, Yori and Charron divided the class into small groups and gave each one a box full of the same materials. The groups had 45 minutes to build a water filter using only what they had just been given.

“We wanted them to imagine they were in a remote location with limited resources. They had chlorine tablets to purify the water. But, they hadn’t anticipated that the water would be so dirty with particulate,” explains Charron. Chlorine attaches to particulate, so normal amounts of the chemical wouldn’t be effective. Increasing chlorine levels, however, affects taste and safety. To get potable water, the students would need to build filters that could turn dark water clear.

During the same 45-minute period, students also had to write standard operating procedures. In the next class, different groups would then critique instructions and give feedback on reproducing the same filter. The materials in the box were a garden hose, an empty water bottle, an empty gallon milk bottle, two Ziploc bags, a bag of aquarium rock, a bag of sand, one black sock, zip ties, an X-acto knife, and metal mesh.

“All the filters looked very different, but they all worked,” says Charron. “I was impressed by their ingenuity. They didn’t just think outside of the box, some of them used the box in their designs.”

“But, a lot of issues surprised the class,” she adds. “Simple instructions caused problems. If you write, ‘cut it in half,’ which way does that mean, horizontally or vertically? If it states, ‘pour in the sand,’ how much does that mean exactly?”

Alex Moran, one of the students in the seminar, recalls his group’s experience, “As we were writing the SOP, all of our instructions seemed clear and straightforward. Trying to understand the instructions two weeks later, however, proved more difficult. It really shed some light on the complexities of designing a concise, easily understood document.”

“I’ve been running labs and conducting studies in the field for more than 14 years,” says Yori. “No matter how well SOPs are developed, issues always come up. Our students need to learn to start anticipating pitfalls. And, just as important, they need to make sure they consider the situation from the other person’s perspective.”

You can watch students explain how they built their filters and see more examples of the finished products on the Department’s Facebook page and website.

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