2013-2014 MPH Practicum Award Recipients

The eight 2013-2014 awardees are:

Sadie Barr & Natalie Draisin, MPH/MBA Candidates

**Project:** Adding Caffeine to Foods: A New Public Health Challenge  
**Partner:** US Food and Drug Administration  
**Course:** Johns Hopkins Clinic for Public Health Law and Policy

Sadie Barr and Natalie Draisin completed their practica through participation on a team of six students in the practicum course Johns Hopkins Clinic for Public Health Law and Policy. Their team, under the guidance of Hopkins faculty, addressed the market influx of added caffeine to food products where it traditionally has not been found (e.g., in high calorie snack foods such as potato chips, candy bars, and beef jerky), many of which are marketed to vulnerable populations. The addition of caffeine to such foods may cause habituation, essentially increasing the likelihood that people get “hooked” on these unhealthy foods. In the clinic, Sadie, Natalie and their team had seven weeks to become experts on the topic before their culminating presentation to Michael Taylor, J.D., FDA Deputy Commissioner for Foods and Veterinary Medicine. Their seven weeks included examining the scientific literature to support the habituation claim; conducting an analysis of these foods in the marketplace; and performing research to inform their policy position. To complement the students’ project, the faculty facilitated presentations by subject matter experts to provide background and insight on the subject. The results were distilled into a comprehensive 40-minute presentation for Mr. Taylor and his FDA associate. The goal was to convey to Mr. Taylor, a food policy expert, the gravity of this issue as a growing public health concern that should be addressed through the team’s recommended policy interventions. Mr. Taylor was impressed with their work and was enlightened about the habituation issue relating to caffeine and its potential implications for public health. In fact, he was so impressed that he encouraged the team to publish their findings in a peer-reviewed journal. As such, Sadie, Natalie and two classmates are preparing an article to submit for publication. A published paper will provide scientific evidence to help bring about and inform policy and regulatory changes. In addition, both Sadie and Natalie are planning to continue their collaborations with the FDA on this issue over the next year. The Johns Hopkins Clinic for Public Health Law and Policy was undoubtedly a highlight of the students’ Hopkins experience, serving as a real-world application of what they learned in class. The most powerful part of the experience was learning directly how the policy process works in this area. The students hope that their work will have an impact on public health policy related to the addition of caffeine to foods.
Project: Post-conflict Reconciliation and Health Delivery in Kigutu, Burundi
Partner: Village Health Works (VHW)

Cathryn’s practicum was completed in partnership with the NGO Village Health Works (VHW), a community-based organization founded in 2006 in Kigutu, Burundi. The aim of the practicum was to understand, document, and maximize VHW’s role in promoting post-conflict reconciliation. The practicum included both a literature review and an on-site component. The literature review examined existing research on how health care organizations have impacted peace-building in post-conflict settings and how such efforts are measured. The practicum work in Burundi was dedicated to key informant interviews and focus group discussions with community leaders, recently repatriated refugees, government officials, and various staff members from clinical, educational and agricultural organizations. The goal was to examine VHW’s role in the community, document how it impacts reconciliation, and identify opportunities to do more. Cathryn shared her findings with VHW’s leadership. The level of community engagement, problem-solving and collective pride in Burundi was inspiring. Additionally, as a physician, Cathryn gained perspective and insight through VHW’s ability to foster community healing through music, community flower gardens, adult literacy classes, and other programs that might typically be deemed frivolous. The solidarity forged by this community-owned effort to become a model for the rest of the country offers lessons for nations throughout the world. This practicum experience has greatly impacted Cathryn’s future as she anticipates an ongoing role with the organization.
Kim Dam’s practicum involved working with The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis & Malaria to develop a funding toolkit for in-country managers and funding portfolio managers. The toolkit consists of summaries of data (such as size estimates, coverage indicators, etc.) to inform the current landscape of HIV/AIDS among key populations based on existing evidence and identify gaps in country-specific HIV/AIDS program areas. Kim worked closely with staff, students and fellows from both the Center and The Foundation for AIDS Research (amFAR) to create concise, yet rigorous, evidence-based summaries and tools based on the latest science on HIV/AIDS of key populations. The team summarized findings such as size estimates, prevalence, current coverage, indicators and targets to over 13 countries considered to be part of “High Impact Africa.” The Global Fund will utilize the data from the toolkit to inform their funding allocations to countries. Understanding funding mechanisms can have tremendous impact on the ability to allocate resources efficiently and equitably. Thus, this practicum experience enabled Kim to get at the crux of the growing HIV/AIDS epidemic in key populations, and address larger structural inequalities that continue to criminalize and ostracize such communities. Kim’s passions lie in ensuring that the most marginalized populations, particularly those in low-resourced or rural areas, have the opportunity to reach their full potential. The practicum has given Kim the experience and perspective, along with quantitative and qualitative skills, to gather the evidence to begin addressing these complex issues. Kim aims to apply skills gained in this experience to her future goals to create public health interventions to address gender, migration and labor inequalities.
Phillip Gross’s practicum was completed with Moveable Feast, a non-profit organization that prepares and delivers nutritious meals at no cost for people with HIV/AIDS and other life-threatening chronic diseases. He conducted a cross-sectional survey to assess the impact of the home-delivered meals on both the health outcomes and healthcare costs of its clients. Findings from this endeavor informed the development of a white paper and advocacy efforts. Phillip initiated his practicum with a literature review of food insecurity and food security interventions, as well as an assessment of initiatives of similar non-profit organizations around the country and consultation with academic experts in the field. Building on the findings from this work, he then designed a mixed methods study including a survey and interview. It is anticipated that the study and dissemination of the findings will be completed over the summer. Phillip is working in collaboration with other Association of Nutrition Services Agencies (ANSA) members to develop a session on this topic for next fall’s American Public Health Association (APHA) annual meeting in New Orleans. This practicum was the highlight of Phillip’s MPH year, as it directly aligns with his passions in both nutrition and medicine. This experience will help propel him towards his career goals and aims.
Yvonne S. Kingon, MPH

**Project:** Developing a Literacy-appropriate Multimedia Education Program for People Living with HIV/AIDS  
**Partner:** Baltimore City Health Department  
**Course:** Baltimore Community Practicum (BCP)

Yvonne Kingon partnered with the Baltimore City Health Department (BCHD) in her practicum to develop the first multimedia education program for people living with HIV/AIDS entitled, “Positively!”. Positively! is a computer-based set of learning modules combining animation, live-action sequences, voiceover narration, and hyperlinks to deliver educational messages to people with HIV/AIDS, particularly those with limited literacy about their diagnosis, treatment and prevention. As an HIV provider for over a decade, Yvonne provided expert consultation in the script development and production, as well as identifying resources and performing in an on-camera HIV provider speaking role. The project provided Yvonne with a new perspective on population health, illuminating the concept that caring for a community as a whole, rather than for individual patients, requires a different level of fortitude and patience. Although the concept of community health is discussed in classes and addressed in assignments, it cannot be fully understood until immersed into such an effort, such as Yvonne’s work on Positively! This work gave Yvonne a first-hand perspective of a resource-limited but dedication-rich municipal health department. Upon graduation, Yvonne plans to build on the relationships she developed in her practicum to become a permanent member of Baltimore’s HIV care community.
Project: Systematic Improvement Recommendations for Baltimore City’s Summer Food Service Program
Partners: Baltimore City Food Policy and Baltimore Partnership to End Childhood Hunger

City Food Policy Director and the Program Director of the Baltimore Partnership to End Childhood Hunger in her practicum to create a policy document regarding meal quality and food procurement practices for Baltimore City’s federal Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). The practicum goal was to create a document to serve as a starting point for making systematic improvements to Baltimore City’s SFSP implementation, as well as provide assessments of and best practices from other similar programs across the United States. Sara reviewed literature on the SFSP program, as well as interviewed sponsors and vendors in Baltimore City and representatives from the public school system and City offices to become familiar with Baltimore City’s SFSP program. Additionally, Sara interviewed program sponsors and child hunger advocates throughout the US. Moreover, Sara attended meetings of the Baltimore Summer Meals working group, which fosters program innovation and improvements. As a Registered Dietitian, prior to entering the MPH program Sara’s focus had been centered on individual nutrition assessment. This practicum illuminated the wider, more systematic and programmatic aspects of food provision. This work solidified Sara’s commitment to child nutrition projects at both the state and federal levels. Sara looks forward to continuing her career in Baltimore with a large nutrition program where she can incorporate the knowledge and skills she gained during the experience.
Ariella Zbar partnered with Health Care for the Homeless, Inc. (HCH) in her practicum to conduct an organizational assessment of trauma-informed care (TIC) at HCH. TIC is care that is sensitive to the manifestations of prior trauma (e.g. post-traumatic stress disorder) and works to avoid re-traumatization. It also aims to prevent secondary trauma (i.e. burn-out) in those caring for individuals with a history of trauma. TIC is integral to providing care for persons experiencing homelessness, as it is in itself a traumatic experience. During her practicum, she worked with a team at HCH and a PhD candidate from Hopkins to conduct client interviews and staff surveys to assess whether HCH provides TIC. The results from these interviews and surveys will be analyzed to find areas in need of improvement as they relate to providing TIC (for example, if clients feel safe while attending HCH). Focus groups will be conducted to develop solutions and these will be presented to the organization’s leadership. The overall goal of this project is to ensure HCH is providing TIC to best care for some of the city’s most vulnerable populations. As a primary care physician and a resident in public health and preventive medicine, an understanding of trauma-informed care will enhance Ariella’s future interactions with patients experiencing homelessness. Additionally, as community-academic relationships are becoming increasingly important in building strong public health involvement in communities, this work will advance her abilities to forge partnerships as a community-based public health physician. This practicum experience was a definite highlight of Ariella’s MPH studies and she is continuing to work with HCH to see the project through to completion.