

Growth in Global Health Engagement at Jefferson and Beyond: MPH Student Perspectives

Since it first formed in 2006, the Global Health Initiatives Committee (GHIC) has blossomed into a symbol for innovation and collaboration on global health projects across the Thomas Jefferson University (TJU) community. GHIC represents the academic pillar of Global Jefferson and serves to educate and captivate students, faculty and staff about issues in healthcare that transcend national boundaries and promote diversity. GHIC brings together faculty and students from various disciplines across the University with decades of experience in global health and deep roots in their local communities. GHIC first convened as an interdisciplinary planning group working with little to no funding to develop effective communication streams across TJU and Philadelphia. Over the past few years, the committee focused on providing Jefferson students and trainees with access to quality global health curriculum, research, and service-learning/service opportunities that will broaden and enhance their educational expertise in the field. Thus far, GHIC has delivered more than 20 seminars, engaged in 30+ scholarly presentations, published various peer-reviewed articles and publications, and developed a set of Interactive Curriculum Experience (ICE) modules for the benefit of global health promotion at Jefferson. Moving forward, GHIC will maintain its commitment to the Global Jefferson mission and support the development of various international learning centers.

As student representatives from the Jefferson College of Population Health, (JCPH) we have had the opportunity to better understand the mission and core values of this committee as they related to our future careers in public health. The

opportunity has given us a platform to further explore the importance of focusing on the social determinants of health, including the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age, and the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life, as described by the [World Health Organization](#).¹

The committee recognizes the need to include these public health principles in the curriculum and field work of our students and future health professionals.

One focus of the GHIC's current work is developing curriculum for health professional students that will explore global health fundamentals, cultural competency, and human rights, drawing parallels to the standards provided by various organizations and world-renowned schools of public and global health. This curriculum will be in different colleges across TJU during the initial stages of development but will eventually be available to all students. The hope is that a curriculum of this scope will better prepare students for future ethical and sustainable work with global populations. The committee has identified areas of improvement in student knowledge and experience, including the need for more in-depth material about emerging global health issues, information about ethical global health practice for foreign practitioners, and in particular, interpersonal



Brandon Horvath and Pia Ghosh

skills and cultural competency training that will enable students to interact most effectively with the community. In addition, GHIC has brainstormed ways for students to engage outside the United States that will be mutually beneficial to our students here in the US and students and colleagues globally.

We have also been involved with of the Jefferson Global Health Student Consortium (GHSC) that brings together a variety of TJU student organizations to collaborate on raising student awareness of global health issues. GHSC consists of on-campus organizations such as [JeffHOPE](#), [Refugee Health Partners \(RHP\)](#), and [Puentes de Salud](#) that each target different populations in Philadelphia. JeffHOPE allows students to participate in interprofessional teams (consisting of medical, physical therapy, and pharmacy students) at homeless shelters to help fill gaps in medical and rehabilitation care for the Philadelphia homeless population. RHP operates a student-run clinic and participates in citywide education and community settings. Puentes de Salud allows students to engage with South Philadelphia's

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rapidly growing Latino immigrant community to address the comprehensive wellness needs of the population.

The consortium hosts unique events, such as a recent screening and guided discussion of American Heart, a documentary detailing the health care experiences of three refugees at a health clinic in Minnesota. These events help to encourage new collaborations and strengthen existing partnerships by providing students with up-to-date knowledge about current events and service opportunities. These opportunities not only allow for responsible and respectful engagement with vulnerable populations, but help educate students to engage with global and local populations and become future community advocates and informed practitioners. As the consortium begins its transition from a working group to an active student organization during this upcoming academic year, the group will be able to more effectively embody its goals and values.

Among Jefferson's global health education opportunities, students can participate in a number of clinical and service-learning experiences within their disciplines. The JCPH allows students to arrange global projects to serve as their clerkship and capstone research experiences. The Sidney Kimmel Medical College's Rwanda Health & Healing Project provides students with immersive opportunities that are both enriching and sustainable, emphasizing a bidirectional model of global health education, in which trainees from Rwanda come to learn here at Jefferson. In partnership with Hearts in Motion, the

Department of Physical Therapy in the Jefferson College of Health Professions sent seven physical therapy students and three faculty members to Guatemala in late February 2017 as part of a global service-learning opportunity to practice their clinical skills in an ethical and culturally sound manner. The student group Global Health Brigades has taken trips to Honduras, Panama, Nicaragua and Ghana in recent years, striving to expose students to the necessity of cross-cultural competency and global healthcare and to service opportunities both locally and abroad for the application of skills obtained in the classroom.

Development of these essential skills and engagement in their global experiences will propel students toward the levels of career readiness and professional development expected by employers. Our faculty members have consciously placed an emphasis on developing curriculum for students in all different health disciplines. In addition, we have had the opportunity to attend educational conferences such as the recent 2017 Consortium of Universities for Global Health Conference in Washington, DC this past April. The exposure to the current research and implementation work of our future colleagues from around the world was both insightful and motivating.

As public health students, we are currently working on our capstone projects in a variety of fields with the hopes that research in important topics today can help better inform community health programming for the future. One example

is the use of diverse research methods and program evaluation such as PhotoVoice, structured interviewing, and secondary data analysis in diverse and growing refugee, asylee, and immigrant populations from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. This work will help us better understand and advocate for resettled global populations here in Philadelphia and abroad. Every year, more global health research is being done by students and faculty in the community as partnerships are being built.

We are grateful for the enriching experience of working with GHIC and its dedicated members. As future public health practitioners, it remains essential that Jefferson students, like ourselves, continue to remain active and engaged within the University, local and global communities. This opportunity has provided us with insight into the processes required to achieve the aforementioned curriculum, community service, and health-specific goals and objectives of GHIC. Building synergistic community partnerships will help increase the collective impact that members of the Jefferson community can have at both the local and global levels.

Pia M. Ghosh

Pia.Ghosh@jefferson.edu

Brandon Horvath

Brandon.Horvath@jefferson.edu

Pia and Brandon are MPH Students in the Jefferson College of Population Health

REFERENCES

1. World Health Organization. Social Determinants of Health. http://www.who.int/social_determinants/en/ Accessed September 10, 2017.