Congratulations to HPM PhD students who recently completed their dissertations!

Amy Bonilla, “The Role of Licensed Mental Health Staffing in Improving Patient Outcomes at Health Centers” (chair: Nady Pourat)

Petra Rasmussen, “Understanding Consumer Health Insurance Decision-Making Under the Affordable Care Act” (chair: Tom Rice)

Karen Woo, “The Association Between Frailty and Hemodialysis Vascular Access Fistula and Graft Failure” (chair: Patti Ganz)

Learning the Lessons of 2020

We are all eagerly looking forward to the next—and we hope last—stage of the COVID-19 pandemic. While COVID was a defining feature of 2020, it was also a year that brought long-overdue attention to pervasive racial inequities in US society. Although many faculty and students in HPM study health disparities, 2020 helped us to understand how urgent it is to promote health equity not just in the communities we work with, but also in our own educational programs.

The PhD committee is actively discussing how to improve equity in our programs. We started by making some changes to PhD admissions. We pilot-tested a new rubric designed to encourage evaluation of candidates across multiple dimensions, including academic preparation, scholarly preparation, alignment with program, and potential contributions to diversity. While the Department has always used holistic admissions, the adoption of a formal rubric was helpful in structuring our discussions. The program has made the GRE optional for this and next year’s admissions cycles, and we are evaluating the role and value of GRE scores in the admissions process.

We are also working with the Department’s EDI committee to modify the PhD core curriculum, in order to better represent the breadth of topics investigated by our students and faculty. Some classes will be renamed to reflect a focus not solely in health services, but rather in the broader determinants of health. The program is also undertaking a curriculum review to identify where content should be added.

These changes and others are part of an ongoing effort to take lessons from the tumult of 2020. While it will always be remembered as the pandemic year, we hope that it will leave a more lasting mark through the emphasis on equity, diversity and inclusion.

-Fred Zimmerman, Director of the MS & PhD programs
Humans of HPM

This is a new feature that will explore mentors’ and mentees’ perspectives on the HPM PhD program. Excerpts from the conversations are included here; read more at the PhD program site.

MENTEE: KATE McBRIDE, completed HPM PhD in 2021
About me:
• I transferred from the HPM MPH program because I wanted to be on the research side.
• I got comfortable with research through the coursework but only truly learned how to be a researcher by conducting research.

Advice:
• Talk to as many people as you can, and work with faculty across departments and research centers.
• Starting in Year 1, seek professional development and learn what the trajectory is for academia, industry, etc.
• Learn how to not get burnt out. Set boundaries, set expectations.
• 1st year, focus on your classes and meet with a lot of professors. After that, be flexible and give yourself the chance to explore, including courses outside the department.

MENTOR: CORRINA MOUCHERAUD, HPM Assistant Professor since 2015
About me:
• I did not plan on pursuing a career in academia, and came to this path late during my PhD.
• I am an involved mentor, and in exchange I expect the same from my mentees.

Advice:
• Find a committee chair whose style matches your needs.
• Share your proposal and dissertation drafts and ideas early & often.
• Be curious and open to ideas. Read a lot and embrace new directions.

New courses

Here are new classes that may be of interest to HPM PhD students:

1. Dr. Zhu will be teaching Organizational Analysis (HPM 415) in the Spring quarter. This course is designed as a doctoral seminar aiming to introduce organizational theories relevant to understanding healthcare and public health organizations’ behavior and performance. Students interested in healthcare and public health systems, healthcare reform and transformation, access, quality, safety, quality improvement, and implementation science will find this course particularly informative. The seminar discussion will focus on applying and operationalizing different theoretical perspectives in empirical studies.

2. Mental Health Policy: Investing in Children’s Mental Health (HPM 249-1) The course uses an interactive, seminar format to analyze major policy problems and opportunities related to mental health for younger populations. The course focuses on three interrelated questions: 1) which programs and policies represent the best investments in mental health for children and youth; 2) are we making those investments as a society?; 3) how can we make better investments than we are currently doing? Students write brief weekly reflections on the readings, contribute regularly to class discussions, and complete a policy analysis on a topic of their choice.
HPM Workgroup on Qualitative and Mixed Methods Research

Please join the newly formed HPM Workgroup on Qualitative and Mixed Methods Research on Friday April 23rd, 2021 from 12-1 pm. The goal of the workgroup is to create a space to discuss qualitative and mixed methods study designs related to health policy and health services research among students, alumni, and faculty within the HPM department. We plan to host monthly meetings for the HPM community to engage on these topics; meetings will include faculty insight from using these methods in their research projects as well as provide a space for students and faculty to develop and share feedback on current qualitative/mixed methods projects. April Workgroup Zoom Information: https://ucla.zoom.us/j/98928837892

Meet some of our AHRQ post-doctoral scholars!

Miranda Yaver is a political scientist who received her Ph.D. in Political Science from Columbia University. Her research has appeared in the American Journal of Political Science and the Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization, with additional writings appearing in The New York Times, The Washington Post, Bustle, Rewire News, and The Guardian. She contributes policy briefs to the Brief-19 team on COVID research, and utilizing original surveys, her health policy research focuses on women's health policy, mental health amid COVID-19, and inequality stemming from health insurance claim denials. Prior to shifting her research agenda to health policy, she was a Lecturer in Political Science at Yale and Tufts Universities. When not doing health policy research, she enjoys live music, sports, and performing stand-up comedy.

Ashley Gromis received her PhD in Sociology from UCLA in 2017. Her research examines how social networks influence vaccine decision-making and the consequences of spatial clustering of vaccine refusals on disease transmission. When not working, you are likely to find her hiking, trying new recipes, putting together puzzles, or conducting her comparative study of which LA brewery pours the best flight.

Kathryn (Kate) Leifheit is an epidemiologist interested social policies as determinants of population health and health equity. Kate’s recent research draws connections between housing insecurity and health, with a particular focus on residential evictions. In her spare time, Kate enjoys cooking, reading, traveling, exploring the outdoors, and hanging out with her hound dog, Bandit.

Samuel (Sam) Valdez is a LAAHSRT post-doctoral fellow interested in health care provider market structure, the price, quality, and network determination in provider markets, and the economics of physician treatment and referral decisions. He received his PhD in economics from the University of California, Irvine.

Vanessa Torres earned her PhD in Health Services from the University of Washington, School of Public Health in 2019. Her research interests are to use mixed methods approaches to understand how gender, immigration status, poverty, and other contextual factors affect patterns of health behavior and health status in Latino communities. Her research focuses on engaging Latinos in community-based participatory research to gain a better understanding of effective intervention approaches to reduce mental health disparities and disparities in substance use. In her spare time, she enjoys hiking, cooking, travelling, going to wineries, and spending time with friends.
Recent publications by HPM PhD students


