

Student Stories

by Kelly Sjol



Each year, master's and doctoral students practice applying classroom learning to real-world public health settings. This on-the-job experiential learning can range from 200 to 1,000 hours and may be called a practicum, internship, field placement, or residency.

With guidance from a faculty member and an on-site preceptor, students work at a variety of sites, including nonprofit organizations, hospitals, and corporations, exposing them to professional settings and contacts, enhancing valuable skills, and leading to more informed career decision making—and sometimes a job offer.

Here are recent Pitt Public Health field experiences from a few of our students.

Haylee Andrews (EPI '17) traveled to Kigali, Rwanda, over the summer to intern with Life for a Child (LFAC) under Professor Trevor Orchard. LFAC partners with the Rwanda Diabetes Association (RDA) to provide insulin and syringes, diabetes educa-



tion, HbA1c testing, and blood glucose monitoring to youth with type 1 diabetes. Andrews compared participant files with database records and later traveled with two RDA nurses to meet with around the country to meet with program participants for their quarterly check-ups. "After traveling to Rwanda and having such a good experience, I've decided that I would like to eventually work internationally in a global health-related career, so I would say that my internship in Rwanda was definitely a pivotal event in my life."

Joel Lowery (IDM '17), a participant in the Allegheny County Health Department's Pittsburgh Summer Institute (ACHD PSI), assisted in conducting its annual surveillance of West Nile Virus (WNV) in order to make informed decisions on vector control related to mosquitoes. In addition to WNV, the team monitored Aedes albopictus, a possible mosquito vector for the Zika virus. Lowery was responsible for setting

traps, entering data, and shipping samples to the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection for testing. From his experience he took away a better insider understanding of how health departments operate and is considering pursuing a position in vector control. Lowery also appreciated the opportunity to confirm what many of his Pitt Public Health professors stressed during his first year: the importance of backing up public health measures with evidence. "I got a first-hand look at this with my project."

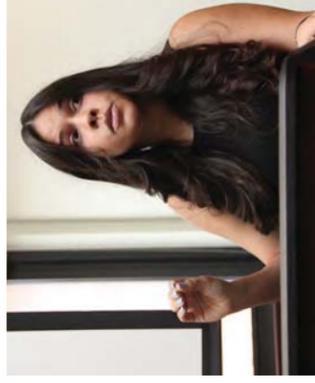
With support from a field research grant, **Lycia**

Tramujas Vasconcellos Neumann (BCHS '19) returned to her home country to conduct fieldwork toward her DrPH studies. Titled "The Role of Community Support for Healthy Aging: A Study with Low-Income, Community-Dwelling Seniors in Brazil," her project is an observational cross-sectional research



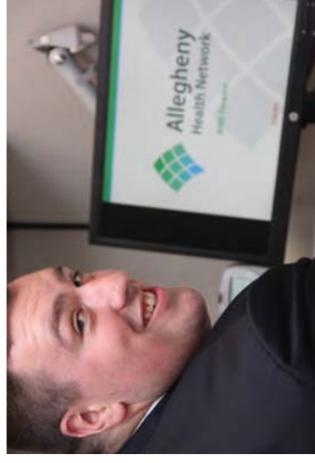
study in cooperation with Pastoral da Pessoa Idosa (PPI), the country's only national organization dedicated to supporting seniors. Neumann, who plans to publish and present her work as well as share it with PPI, used qualitative methods such as focus groups and key informant interviews to explore perceptions of community volunteers, seniors, and experts in aging across the country.

ACHD PSI participant **Samantha Rodriguez** (IDM '16) helped to plan, execute, and review the county's Raccoon Oral Rabies Vaccination (ORV) program, as well as assisted with ORV distribution. This year's was the largest hand-baiting effort since the program's inception 14 years ago; during this period, the county's population of rabid raccoons has been reduced by 77 percent. Rodriguez, whose work was praised by her ACHD colleagues, took full advantage of her internship. In addition to working with the ORV program,



she went on housing and building inspections, spent a day with a public health nurse, and made many connections. "Most importantly," she says, "I got a tour of the microbiology laboratory and, after a long process, was offered a job as a public health microbiologist, which has been my career goal for years."

To fulfill the MHA program's residency requirement, **Mario "Mark" Scarpinato** (HPM '17) planned to spend the summer working with Allegheny Health Network (AHN); however, he's now been asked to continue working at Allegheny General Hospital through the coming school year. Working in corporate finance enables Scarpinato to develop system-wide insights into how the finances of major health systems operate. "I chose to work as a financial resident to further my understanding of finance," he says. "I have always been interested in numbers, and this residency gave me the opportunity to work with



numbers and to help move AHN to financial stability."

Kristina Wint (BCHS '17) interned this summer at Community Human Services (CHS) in Oakland as part of the Bridging the Gaps program, in which students work directly with underserved populations to better understand their health needs. Wint helped to set up the

CHS food pantry, assisted customers, and partnered on launching a photo-journaling project that will both document customers' lived experiences and serve to improve food pantry operations. "Both CHS and I were learning from each other, helping each other," she says. "My time at CHS taught me that small interventions make a world of difference—that by providing food or a home, and ultimately both, you can start the process of completely changing a person's life and their entire well-being." ●

