Locally Global: Young Leaders for Global Health 2013

Each summer, the Harvard Global Health Institute (HGHI) supports Harvard students in “experiential learning” opportunities that help to build skills and informed personal perspectives necessary for leadership in global health. More than 100 students participated in 2013—working either with independent organizations or paired up with Harvard faculty mentors—at research sites in over 20 countries around the world, including local research sites in Cambridge and Boston. The “Young Leaders for Global Health” program, formerly known as SURF and I-SURF (for [International] Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowships), provides integrated learning using informal discussions, group meetings, and a structured curriculum that included four mandatory workshops. Workshops in 2013 focused on world health, human rights, and ethical reasoning (February 20); global cooperation, principled partnerships, and communicating in unfamiliar settings (March 7) health, safety, and regional scenarios in the global setting (April 11), and a concluding session following the summer experiences (October 9) that invited reflection, reconnection, and continuing discovery in global health. Curriculum faculty included Sue J. Goldie (HGHI and Harvard School of Public Health), Jennifer Leaning (Harvard School of Public Health and Harvard Medical School), Jennifer Kasper (Harvard Medical School), Brittany Seymour (Harvard School of Dental Medicine). Additional speakers included staff from the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies and the Committee on African Studies, speech coach Nancy Goldberg, educator Michael Seymour, and Steve Taylor, Harvard University’s International Safety and Security Director at Harvard Global Support Services.

“I thought the summer would help me narrow my focus, but now I see even more options,” said Deirdre Buckley, one of the 25 students who stayed local. Based at HGHI, Buckley worked with fellow Harvard undergraduates, Oscar Xia and Soa Andrian, as part of the HGHI Program Development internship launched in 2012. In addition to their individual research projects, the three also co-led weekly brownbag discussions on topics that ranged from cook stoves to adolescent health, urbanization, polio and malaria eradication campaigns, and nutrition.

The Institute also hosted a weekly speaker series for local interns, organized by Research Coordinator, Lindsey Kreutzer, MPH. Sessions included group discussions on some of the challenges faced by interns, and explored interns’ developing thoughts about their career options in global health. Guest speakers included Harvard Medical School Professor...
Daniel Shapiro, Director of the Harvard International Negotiation Program; Harvard School of Dental Medicine Instructor and Inaugural HGHI Fellow, Brittany Seymour (on global oral health); Boston University School of Public Health faculty Kimberly Shea (on vaccine epidemiology) and Erin Hasselberg (on supply chain management); and Daniel Church of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. A poster session on August 14 at the Harvard Faculty Club gave students and faculty further opportunity to discuss research findings in detail.

The 2013 program concluded with a dinner in October to “reflect and reconnect” on lessons learned and plans for the future. Maurine Nkatha-Gitonga, who spent her summer in France and South Africa with the Idea Translation Laboratory, performed a public reading of her winning student reflection essay, “Was I Barbaric?” The essay applies a cultural interpretive framework to the challenge of implicit biases about pain and risk in ritual circumcision for young men in Kenya and South Africa.

“This summer has opened up a lot of interests I haven’t thought of before,” said Chad Benoit, a social studies concentrator who spent the summer working with Dr. Theresa Betancourt’s Research Program on Children and Global Adversity at Harvard School of Public Health. “And that it’s okay not to know something.”

Information about the 2014 Young Leaders for Global Health program, research placements, and application deadlines is available here. For more information, please contact Rebekah Getman, Senior Program Manager, at globalhealtheducation@harvard.edu.