Program Development in Global Health

What are the challenges for women in the health workforce? How does urbanization affect health in urban informal settlements? Who can help us choose and shape a global health career? What do high school students want to know about global health?

Four Harvard undergraduates had the opportunity to explore these related but far-ranging questions this summer, as they worked together as the Harvard Global Health Institute’s first Program Development Interns. As part of the global health research cohort, along with the Institute-sponsored Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship (SURF) program, the interns lived together in campus housing, met for regular seminars and discussion, and developed individual independent projects planned together with their assigned mentors. In addition to this new internship, the Institute also sponsored 20 local SURF interns this summer as well as 30 students who experienced global health learning at an international (I-SURF) site. The four selected for the Program Development internship had the opportunity to focus on developing curricular materials on integrative, cross-disciplinary issues in global health.

Hazel Lever, a senior concentrating in history and science with a secondary field of Global Health/Health Policy focused her research on “women in the health workforce.” The project drew on her experience as an HIV/AIDS educator in rural Tanzania during the summer of 2010 with the organization, Support for International Change. In Tanzania, she says, “I witnessed first-hand the need for increased support for health services and education in developing countries—and also the need for collaboration with local leaders and the community as a whole.” Now applying these lessons more broadly, Lever looked at the challenges and tensions that women face in the health workforce, in a comparison of examples from South Africa, India, and Brazil. “Double subjectivity” and “double domesticity,” she suggests, may put an added burden on women who balance work with cultural expectations.

Career counseling inspired by outside-the-box role models may be one solution to such challenges, at least in North America. Harvard College junior, Nora Eccles, focused her internship research this summer on “The Realm of Possibility,” a problem-based career guidance tool-in-development, created by Jason Outlaw, a doctoral student at the Harvard School of Dental Medicine. The tool, planned to go live as an interactive website sometime over the next few months, draws on detailed

Five ways you can get involved in global health at Harvard

START YOUR EDUCATION
Take a course in global health: Gain a global health outlook with a general education course in global health, or pursue specific interests by choosing from more than 100 cross-listed courses.

LEARN FROM A MENTOR
Work with university faculty: Work hand-in-hand with faculty members from across the university on independent research projects, educational activities, and Institute-sponsored initiatives.

EXPERIENCE GLOBAL HEALTH
Pursue a summer internship: Choose one that provides research opportunities and real-world experiences to synthesize and contextualize classroom knowledge.

PURSUE A SECONDARY FIELD
Through a Global Health and Health Policy secondary field, explore interdisciplinary world health challenges from many perspectives; study health delivery, systems, and policies using different disciplinary approaches.

STAY INVOLVED
Enroll in our Global Health Registry: Sign up to find resources, courses, internships, and new opportunities.

More about Institute-funded internships for Harvard students

"Experiential Learning" (home page for all internship opportunities)
"Internships: Changing Perspectives" (reflections by students who participated in 2011 I-SURF opportunities)
"Student Profile: Grace Kim ('10)" (how a SURF summer influenced one student’s career choices)
"Traveling Prepared: Culture, Language, Ethics, and Safety" (about the 2012 pre-departure orientation program)
interviews with global health professionals and faculty to help students shape their ideal career in the field of global health.

The city itself may be a global health challenge, suggests intern Cynthia Tassopoulos, now a senior in the History of Science. Last summer, Tassopoulos took part in the I-SURF program, working with Dr. Arachu Castro on maternal mortality in the Dominican Republic where, she says, “I witnessed some cases of extremely poor standards of care that Dominican and Haitian women faced in the hospitals.” For the program development internship this summer, she studied “Urbanization: The urban penalty’s effect on health,” with a focus on health in urban informal settlements. The research enabled Tassopoulos to be exposed to a different kind of learning opportunity in the field of global health. With over half of the world now living in cities, the penalty of urbanization is seen most clearly in health differences between those forced to live in informal settlements (slums) compared to those who are better off. Geography, economic instability, lifestyle risks, housing inequities, and an inadequate health care infrastructure all foster continued inequality.

High school students may be the key to tomorrow’s global health solutions, says intern Divya Seth who confesses, “Global health is my passion.” Now a Harvard junior concentrating in neurobiology with a secondary concentration in global health and health policy, Seth is Vice President of the Harvard Undergraduate Global Health Forum, a campus group that has partnered since 2011 with the Cambridge Rindge and Latin School to bring a global health curriculum to high school students. The group works with students in the Health Assisting Program, a three-year course that trains students in knowledge and skills in relevant to various health care fields. They expanded the course last spring to include global health epidemiology. This summer, Seth worked to enhance the existing teaching modules and to create a coherent global health curriculum for the use at the high school level. To inform her work, Seth performed an extensive literature review on existing high school requirements in Massachusetts and recent debates in secondary school reform, thinking about where global health education fits into these learning objectives.

Photo: Harvard Global Health Institute’s summer 2012 interns, from left: Cynthia Tassopoulos, Hazel Lever, Nora Eccles, Divya Seth. Background: Painting by Romero Britto.