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School of Medicine  
Department of Public Health Sciences

***Spring 2023***

Greetings from your MPH colleagues and friends!

Here's a quick update on a few happenings in the MPH Program and PHS Department.

Warmest Regards,  
Ruth (Gaare Bernheim), Aaron (Pannone), and the MPH Team

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**Letter from Dr. Jeanita Richardson on Her Retirement**



My Dear Students and Colleagues,

Endings and beginnings are times of reflection. As my time as a professor in Public Health Sciences draws to a close, I wanted to let all of you know how much you have impacted my life.

To my dear students,

A teacher plants seeds and doesn't often see resulting blooms. Nevertheless, we plant and nurture hoping something we taught sticks and helps you in the future. I have tried to facilitate the honing of your individual gifts and your skills as public health professionals. It has been gratifying watching you flourish. Armed with a few of my mantras like, "The choices people make are constrained by the choices people have", I hope you find in your careers and lives the fulfillment I have found in mine. May you continue to share what you have learned and your considerable talents in ways that benefit communities, our nation, and the world.

To my colleagues,

I can say without reservation that you have been the greatest group of people to work with! I have obviously worked for a long time and have had the opportunity to work in varied settings and organizations. As partners, you have steadfastly been incredibly collegial, supportive, and frankly fun. One example I will always remember is the way we banded together to move from teaching in-person to Zoom with no lead time. So many faculty members across Grounds were left to their own devices to make the shift. We however, worked together and supported each other in a way supportive of our vastly different comfort levels with Zoom. No judgement, just strategies and jokes...lots of jokes. Our virtual time together made me feel much less isolated. I wish all of you the very best

I think I am entitled to be a bit sappy at this moment, so here it comes. Please know that as I embrace my next adventure, I take with me deep gratitude for our time together. May all of you find the joy I take with me from having devoted my heart and skills to making a positive impact on Health, one student, research project, community, and interaction at a time.

Wishing you the best,

Jeanita W Richardson  
Professor Emeritus, Public Health Sciences  
University of Virginia, School of Medicine

## STUDENT SUCCESS



### Master of Public Health Degree Candidates Present Final Projects

From examining clinical outcomes in the hospital to exploring social determinants of health in the community, more than 30 graduating MPH Students showcased their analysis and recommendations to improve Health Outcomes and Health Equity at the PHS Poster Day.

All MPH students complete a final project known as an Integrative Learning Experience (ILE) that demonstrates synthesis of MPH knowledge and skills developed over a 42-credit hour curriculum. Students select an ILE topic in consultation with an MPH Program Faculty advisor appropriate to their educational and professional goals, based on their Program

care quality assessment, qualitative analysis, health impact analysis, and quantitative analysis.

*This story was featured in "Medicine in Motion", the newsletter of the UVA School of Medicine. See more [details about the students' projects on the SOM website](#).*

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## **Konstantine Khutsishvili and Liza Khutsishvili: Father -- Daughter Graduates in Public Health Sciences**

*Editor's Note: As another UVA graduation approaches, Public Health Sciences recognizes the important work its graduates do to improve health in the community, locally and around the globe. These two graduates have a unique history, a close bond, and great potential: Konstantine Khutsishvili, MPH (2018) and daughter, Liza Khutsishvili, a 2023 graduate with dual degrees in Global Public Health and Commerce.*

In their native nation of Georgia, Konstantine Khutsishvili practiced medicine in Obstetrics and Gynecology, while his wife was a pediatrician. With hopes of a better life in the United States, Konstantine's wife applied and gained a position at UVA in clinical research. So, happily, they came to Charlottesville in 2006 when daughter Liza was just 5 years old.

Although unable to work as a physician in the US, Konstantine went into basic research at UVA and soon applied and was accepted to UVA's Master of Public Health program. Attending classes and working full-time, he earned his MPH with a concentration in health policy and ethics in August 2018. With his new degree, Konstantine was promoted in UVA's Histocompatibility (tissue typing/donor matching) Lab. "I learned more about US

Inspired by her father Konstantine's studies as well as both of her parents' commitment to the medical profession, Liza, a fourth year at UVA, graduates in May in both Global Public Health and Commerce, with a concentration in Information Technology. Liza laughs and adds, "It has been good to get advice about choosing professors and classes in public health. My parents also bake bread and bring it to me!"

This summer after graduation, Liza will apply both her knowledge of public health and technology skills to a humanitarian project with the Center for Global Health Equity in Tanzania. This fall, Liza will work for a year with the UVA Health Strategy Team (Jason Lineen, Chief Strategy Officer), and apply to medical school.

See more about [Konstantine and Liza Khutsishvili's story on the PHS website.](#)

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## Two UVA MPH Students Receive Prestigious National Fellowships

Two students in the University of Virginia Master of Public Health Program have received prestigious national fellowships. Donavon Lea received the CDC Public Health Law Fellowship, and Abby Sacks accepted the HHS Health Communication Fellowship. Both outstanding students graduate in May 2023 with a Master of Public Health.

Donavon Lea's fellowship is sponsored by [CDC's Public Health Law Program](#) (PHLP) and [ChangeLab Solutions](#). As the CDC describes, "the Public Health Law Fellowship offers fellows on-the-job training to prepare them for careers in public health law or policy. The program aims to strengthen the public health law workforce by increasing diversity within the field and preparing the next generation of public health law professionals to respond to critical issues. Fellows match with host sites at state, tribal, local, or territorial health departments, CDC, or other public health law organizations that support work in the public health law and policy fields."

From Virginia Beach, Virginia, Donavon graduated in spring of 2022 from UVA's Batten School majoring in Public Policy and Leadership with a minor in Bioethics. "After completing the fellowship, I plan to take a gap year before going to law school and becoming a lawyer." Donavon said.





[Health and Human Services](#) located in Washington, D.C. According to the OASH job description, the position supports senior-level members of the OASH Communications team to develop and implement communications strategies; to conduct research and draft written pieces for publications; to support the social media and website team leader, and help promotion efforts for the OASH principals, initiatives and programs. “Previous health topic areas have included tobacco control, vaccinations, skin cancer prevention, physical activity and nutrition and emerging issues such as the Ebola outbreak.”

A native of Burke, Virginia, Abby holds a BA in psychology and media studies from UVA. Abby said, “I want to do health communications, and I expect to learn a lot in my fellowship. For the future, I’m interested in image-based health messages on social media to better reach populations of younger people or those whose first language is not English.”

[Donavon Lea's & Abby Sacks' full stories are on PHS website.](#)

## FACULTY make NEWS



National Grant for Research  
in Rural Health Disparities in  
the Treatment of Obesity and  
Related Chronic Diseases

received \$3.37 million over five years for a grant to determine how to optimize digital obesity treatment for rural populations and address the obesity epidemic. The National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK) of the National Institutes of Health sponsored the grant. Dr. Krukowski is Co-Principal Investigator with Professor Delia West, PhD at the University of South Carolina’s Arnold School of Public Health. Also on the grant team are Wen You, PhD, professor of Public Health Sciences at UVA, and from South Carolina,

of Public Health Sciences at the University of Virginia, School of Medicine, and her team have

Learn more about [Dr. Krukowski's grant on the PHS website.](#)

**Kelsie D. Kelly, PhD, MPH  
Presents STEAM-H  
Seminar at VSU—  
“Race policy and Health:  
It’s not what you say, it’s  
what you do.”**

“Race policy and Health: It’s not what you say, it’s what you do” is the title of the STEAM-H Seminar presented by Kelsie D. Kelly, PhD, MPH at Virginia State University on April 21. An alumna of VSU, this opportunity became a full circle moment in returning to her first home away from home. Dr. Kelly is now at the University of Virginia serving in multiple roles. She is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Public Health Sciences, School of Medicine; Global Public Health Studies Adviser; and Associate Dean for First year and transfer students and Director of the Peer Advisors program in the Office of African American Affairs.

In the seminar at VSU, Dr. Kelly discussed methods on how we can achieve health equity and reduce health disparities one person at a time. Part of her research includes using qualitative methods in public



housing communities in Charlottesville and Richmond together with community health workers to improve sleep and mental health. Dr. Kelly stated, “By using CBPR (Community-Based Participatory Research), we can learn how working with communities supports public health goals in efforts toward health equity using a resilience framework.”

The STEAM-H Seminar is held weekly at [Virginia State University](#), featuring speakers in Science, Technology, Agriculture, Engineering, Math, and Health.

See more on [Dr. Kelly's presentation on the PHS website.](#)

## New Social Media for UVA's Public Health

PHS launched **new social media pages** on

LinkedIn, Instagram and Facebook. Find us and follow along for some of the latest news on PHS and UVA.



### NEW page on LinkedIn:

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/uva-department-of-public-health-sciences/>

### NEW Instagram and Facebook pages:

Instagram: [https://www.instagram.com/uva\\_phs/](https://www.instagram.com/uva_phs/)

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/UVA.Public.Health.Sciences>



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