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School of Medicine  
Department of Public Health Sciences

### *Summer 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

## STUDENT SUCCESS



**School of Medicine Public Health Sciences  
Confers Degrees**

Research Program at Culbreth Hall.

Meg G. Keeley, MD, Senior Associate Dean for Education, School of Medicine, welcomed students and guests. Jeanita Richardson, PhD, MEd, Professor of Public Health Sciences, addressed the audience as the keynote speaker. Dr. Richardson also was honored at the diploma ceremony as the inaugural recipient of the Department of Public Health Sciences Excellence in Public Health Education Award.

The graduating students completed projects in a broad range of topics such as Clinical Outcomes, Mental Health, One Health, Cancer Prevention, and the Social Determinants of Health. The graduates are going on to careers in many fields including government agencies, health systems, consulting firms, community organizations, not-for-profit groups, NGOs, businesses, and insurance companies

*This story was featured in "Medicine in Motion", the newsletter of the UVA School of Medicine. See more [details and photos of the 2023 MPH Graduation on the SOM website](#).*

You can watch the PHS 2023 MPH/MS-CR diploma ceremony on YouTube.

[Click here to view the graduation video.](#)

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## Jaycee Yegher: Swimming Her Way to Public Health



What do swimming, Harvard, UVA, and Public Health Sciences have in common? That would be Jaycee Yegher! Jaycee spent her last year of NCAA eligibility swimming for UVA's team as a graduate student in the Master of Public Health degree program.

Jaycee earned her bachelor's degree from Harvard University in History of Science

UVA's swim team allowed her to compete while in graduate school at UVA, so it also became her family. Jaycee remarked, "I felt right at home with the team in meetings, shared meals and working toward the common goal of the national championships." Jaycee and her team achieved their goal—UVA's national champion women's swimming and diving team were honored on Monday, June 12 on the White House lawn in a ceremony called "College Athlete Day" that recognized NCAA champions from the 2022-23 academic year.

In the Public Health program, Jaycee focused on Research in Practice for Global Health. With her newly earned degree, Jaycee was hired by a consulting firm in Washington, DC looking at data in

NCAA sports eligibility remaining due to sports being suspended during the COVID-19 pandemic. As the pandemic progressed, Jaycee became interested in Public Health to understand how society could be better prepared for future health emergencies such as pandemics. Jaycee shared, "With family in Maryland, UVA was the perfect choice for graduate school since it was closer to home."

Jason Lyman, we learned how to de-identify and randomize data sets, and that is very similar to what I will be doing in my new job. What I learned at UVA married well with my undergraduate studies. It was a merger of science and humanities that provides the perfect preparation for me for new opportunities in healthcare."

See more about [Jaycee Yegher, MPH on the PHS website.](#)

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## From Mollusks to Maternal Health in Public Health: Courtney Rogers, PhD, MPH

From mollusks to maternal health, Courtney Rogers, PhD, MPH, was working toward a public health career even when she did not know it. Growing up in Virginia, Courtney was undecided on her choice of a major on entering UVA, but she has certainly found her niche. Earning her bachelor's degree with the first cohort of students in Global Public Health Courtney went on to receive her Master's in Public Health Sciences with the 4+1 program. Then, while serving a 2-year fellowship in the Public Health Associate Program with the CDC, she decided to return to UVA to study Systems and Information Engineering. In May 2023, Courtney graduated with a PhD, and now works in the Epidemic Intelligence Service at the CDC.

During her early studies at UVA, Courtney interned at the National Fish Health Research Laboratory, part of the US Geological Survey (USGS), of the Department of the Interior in West Virginia. While there she studied giant African land snails, which were being



For her dissertation, Courtney conducted community-based participatory research with Dr. Valdez working with the Greater Richmond Maternal Child Health Equity Task Force to address transportation barriers to maternal health services. Courtney worked with community partners to design a study that looked at how a multitude of factors, such as childcare, employment policies, technology, and financial constraints, interact to create systemic barriers to transportation for low-income birthing people.

and getting sick with various diseases. This project prompted Courtney's initial interest in public health.

Going on to pursue her MPH at UVA, Courtney worked with mentors Rupa Valdez, PhD, Associate Professor of Public Health Sciences and Systems and Information Engineering and David Edmunds, PhD, Global Development Studies Track Director and Associate Professor of Global Studies, in partnership with Joy Johnson, Holly Edwards, and the public housing community of Westhaven in Charlottesville for the Integrated Learning Experience (ILE) project (an MPH requirement). From a community-based participatory research model, Courtney assisted in conducting focus groups with public housing residents to co-design strategies for chronic disease prevention, including interventions such as community gardens and coupon programs.

In 2019, Courtney began the PhD program in Systems and Information Engineering at UVA, with a concentration in Human Factors Engineering (HFE). Courtney convinced Dr. Valdez, who is also an Associate Professor in the Department of Systems and Information Engineering, to be her dissertation mentor.

awards while a doctoral student, including the Human Factors and Ergonomics Women's Organization for Mentorship and Networking Rising Star Award. Courtney was one of 80 people chosen to serve in the Epidemic Intelligence Service of the CDC, a globally recognized fellowship program renowned for its investigative and emergency response efforts. Matched with the Office of Health Equity, Courtney described her new job, "I will work to advance the science and practice of health equity through epidemiological research focused on understanding the relationship between the social and structural determinants and health outcomes among marginalized populations."

Congratulations on your successes, Courtney! We are excited to see what you do next in Public Health!

See more about [Courtney Rogers and her journey into public health on the PHS website.](#)

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## **Chelsea Edwards: Research on "Protect Black Women: The Inhibitors of Skin Bleaching Product Regulation and Intervention in the African Diaspora"**



A May 2023 graduate in Global Public Health and Spanish, Chelsea Edwards completed her GPH research project entitled, "Protect Black Women: The Inhibitors of Skin Bleaching Product Regulation and Intervention in the African Diaspora". Skin bleaching is the use of topical creams/lotions/gels, etc., used with the intent to lighten the complexion of the face and body. A practice common in Latin America, East/South Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean (essentially anywhere colonized by Europe), Chelsea focused her capstone on African and Afro-Caribbean women.

Describing the history, Chelsea wrote, "The practice of skin bleaching is derived from racism/colorism that emerged during slavery and colonization, which created a social hierarchy that placed Black people on the bottom and labeled their features as ugly and undesirable." Then, she related the current situation, "Today, light skin functions as social capital in society, as fair skin people are found more likely to be employed, have higher education, have higher social status, have a social support network and/or spouse, and higher personal earnings. Many people bleach their skin today as a survival method to access higher social status, and particularly for women, whose social

curb access and usage of skin bleaching products (SBPs)," exclaimed Chelsea. "Thus, my project served to answer the question, 'why have countries failed to protect Black women?' Or in other words: 'What are the inhibitors to the creation of regulations/interventions aimed at limiting SBP usage, and why are most existing legislations ineffective?'"

Chelsea's capstone findings produced eight non-mutually exclusive inhibitors to the implementation and effectiveness of skin bleaching product regulation. "I identified Rwanda as a particular counter example that is an inspiring success story on regulating SBP sale, distribution, and usage. In my discussion, I explored skin bleaching among Black women in Europe and the United States as a cross cutting theme and explore the potential impact of the One-Drop Rule and Black pride movements as they relate to SBPs."

Chelsea remarked, "I am very proud of this project, as skin bleaching product use is so under-researched." Her recommendations include further education on the dangers of bleaching, simultaneous top-down and bottom-up intervention, inclusion of the affected community (Black women) in the legislative process, and ultimately, anti-discriminatory efforts to uplift dark skin Black women, such that they have the same opportunities as fairer skinned people, and no longer need to bleach their skin as a survival tactic.

Having studied previously at the University of Oxford and in Valencia, Spain, Chelsea is abroad again and currently living in Barcelona, Spain where she will teach English for a year after gaining

bleaching is also linked to beautification. But obviously, dark skin is not inferior to light skin.”

As far as health effects, Chelsea found that skin bleaching has no health benefit and skin bleaching products are linked to significant dangers. Risks can include cancers, scarring, mercury poisoning and other illnesses due to inclusion of hydroquinone and mercury as active ingredients. Chelsea pointed out, “Racism and colorism are also linked to mental health and esteem issues for minorities devalued by society. Many people who use SBPs today do not bleach out of self-hatred, but rather, as a calculated survival tactic to access higher social status. Black women are not simply insecure, vain, or secretly wish to be white, but have been forced by colonization to alter themselves to survive.”

time as an Associate Consultant at Bain & Company in New York City where she worked as an intern in 2022. Her future goals may also include law school with a focus on health law. Outside of work and education, Chelsea enjoys volunteering for youth leadership programs and all types of Latin dance.

Congratulations on your achievements, Chelsea! We know you will do great things!

See more about [Chelsea Edwards and her research on the PHS website.](#)



## FACULTY NEWS

### **Dr. Jeanita Richardson Receives Inaugural Public Health Education Award from PHS**



Educator, researcher, mentor, community activist, colleague, friend, mother—these and many more positive descriptors embody Jeanita Richardson, PhD, M.Ed. who retired in June from the UVA School of Medicine’s Department of Public Health Sciences after serving at UVA since 2008. Before retiring, Dr. Richardson was awarded the title of Professor Emeritus at a UVA university-wide ceremony. At the May MPH and MS-CR diploma ceremony for the Department of Public Health Sciences of the School of Medicine, Dr. Richardson became the inaugural recipient of the Department of Public Health Sciences Excellence in Public Health Education Award. This award recognized her extraordinary commitment to her students, colleagues and educational programs, and in the future, to honor Dr. Richardson, it will be named the Richardson Excellence in Public Health Education Award.

Dr. Richardson excelled in her professional achievements in education, research, and service. She focused on health equity and community engagement to address the social determinants of health. Her many projects included work on childhood issues such as lead poisoning, asthma, and Type 2 diabetes risk. Other areas Dr. Richardson addressed were water quality in South Africa, with historical and contemporary issues in educational equity and effective teaching strategies.

created for research and education with the Saint Kitts and Nevis Islands Ministry of Health, University of Venda in South Africa and Mbarara University in Uganda. Due to her innovation in education, she was also awarded two national grants: the Pathways Program to increase MPH degree applicants from historically underrepresented groups, and the Globalizing the Curriculum Program to prepare graduates and to help faculty design course offerings to fully engage students as global citizens.

Having published numerous articles, book chapters and books on innovative approaches to public health policy, practice and education, Dr. Richardson has taught and mentored many students at every level of the educational continuum. Her 40-year career also includes being a corporate banker, middle school teacher, and senior policy analyst for the Commonwealth's State Council of Higher Education and Department of Planning and Budget.

Dr. Richardson earned respect in community and university engagement by applying both qualitative and quantitative research methods and cemented her involvement with the community including the local health department doing strategic planning, collaborative goal setting and translating research findings into community action and health policy. This community commitment allowed her to be a leader in COVID-19 testing and vaccinations among underserved populations in the last few years.

Anywhere she is involved, Dr. Richardson brings a wealth of expertise and knowledge as well as a supportive and positive demeanor. She is now enjoying spending more time with her children, grandchildren and lending her expertise in ways that promote health and well-being. We all wish her much happiness and all the best in this new phase of life.

Dr. Jeanita Richardson was the keynote speaker at the PHS 2023 MPH and MS-CR diploma ceremony on May 21, 2023. See a few photos below from the graduation ceremony and Dr. Richardson's retirement party.







## Support UVA Public Health Sciences

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