Promoting healthier tomorrows through education and research today
Dear Alumni and Friends

There is a saying – “If it’s not broken, don’t fix it.” That advice may work for appliances, but it doesn’t work for health.

We are on the verge of a major realization in our country — that we must shift our focus more to promoting health and wellness, and preventing disease, injury and disability, rather than treating illness.

It is a shift that moves us from a reactive to a proactive approach for health. It also is a shift that will not only improve health and save lives, it potentially will save our state and nation billions of dollars a year.

The OU College of Public Health is proud to play an important role in educating the new generation of public health professionals to lead our nation in this new direction, in advancing research that furthers these goals, and in preparing public health professionals and volunteers for proper emergency response.

We are one of only 38 accredited colleges of public health in the country and home to four federally funded centers that focus on protecting and improving the public’s health: the Southwest Center for Public Health Preparedness, the OU Prevention Research Center, the Center for American Indian Health Research and the Center for Biosecurity Research.

Public health is important not only in times of emergency, but every day of every year. Clean air, safe food and clean drinking water, immunizing our children, protecting our communities and promoting healthy lifestyles — these all are critical public health issues.

At the OU College of Public Health, our core values and our new strategic plan reflect our unfailing commitment to protecting and improving the health of the residents of our state and our nation, to eliminating health disparities between groups, and to working in partnership with all who share our vision of creating healthier lives for all.

I hope you will enjoy reading about some of the exciting happenings at our college in recent months. It is with great pleasure I share with you this first issue of our new OU Public Health magazine.

Sincerely,

Gary E. Raskob, Ph.D.
Dean, College of Public Health, OU Health Sciences Center

Promoting Healthier Tomorrows Through Education and Research Today
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The OU College of Public Health has devised an ambitious plan to enhance the learning experience for students, further public health research and position the college as a leader in the effort to improve the health of Oklahoma and the United States.

The Strategic Plan for 2006-2010 addresses dozens of areas where officials believe an investment will bring significant returns for the College of Public Health and the public health of Oklahoma.

“The reason it is ambitious is because the public health of Oklahoma is darn awful and it’s an urgent situation. We don’t have time to go slowly,” said Dr. Gary Raskob, dean of the OU College of Public Health.

“If we want to see an impact, a major change over the next 10 to 15 years, we need to act now.”

The Strategic Plan is more than a mere list of “things to do.” Its contents grew from extensive meetings with stakeholders who included the Oklahoma Commissioner of Health and other government, business and community leaders concerned about statistics that have Oklahoma near the bottom of nearly every health category.

Oklahoma is the only state where age-adjusted mortality has worsened through the 1990s and into this century. The state has the highest death rate due to cardiovascular disease in the United States and ranks 44th overall in the 2005 State Health Rankings published by the United Health Foundation.

Most of Oklahoma’s problems are preventable. By reducing such risk factors as smoking, poor diet, little exercise and no health insurance, officials can attack illness and disease before it starts or early in its progression, instead of offering care late or not at all.

The 19-page plan includes a list of such core values as health equity and partnership, and eight goals to address scholarship, training, reduction of health disparities for minority populations — especially American Indian — and enhancement of the college’s role nationally.

These goals will be achieved through various objectives, including:

• Recruiting 10 new faculty;
• Broadening the research funding base beyond the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institutes of Health;
• Establishing 10 endowed chairs;
• Establishing partnerships with tribes, the Hispanic community and traditionally black colleges or community groups;
• Developing three new master’s degrees;
• Implementing a Ph.D. program in Health Policy;
• Equipping three additional classrooms for distance learning;
• Making renovation and modernization of College of Health building a capital improvement priority.

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**EXCELLENCE**
The College of Public Health strives to achieve excellence in all of its endeavors.

**INTEGRITY**
The College of Public Health adheres to the highest standards of honesty, objectivity, transparency, fairness and ethical conduct at all times.

**PUBLIC SERVICE**
The College of Public Health exists to serve the citizens of Oklahoma and the United States through efforts to protect and improve their health, and to contribute to international efforts to improve the health of other nations.

**HEALTH EQUITY**
The College of Public Health advocates the principle that all individuals have a right to the opportunity for a healthy life. The College is committed to reducing and eliminating health disparities among populations.

**RESPONSIBILITY**
The College of Public Health strives to make the most effective use of all resources it receives, to use responsibly all state, federal and private funding, and to leverage its resources into additional resources for the college, university and state of Oklahoma.

**PARTNERSHIP**
The College of Public Health is committed to fostering collegial productive partnerships with all stakeholders who share the vision of protecting and improving the public’s health.
Former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Newt Gingrich had a spirited discussion with Oklahoma health and business leaders during a roundtable gathering in March at the OU College of Public Health.

The former speaker, who is author of the book “Saving Lives & Saving Money: Transforming Health and Healthcare,” answered questions from the group on various health topics and explained how national public policy strategies impact Oklahoma.

Gingrich, 63, talked about many issues discussed in his book, including the inevitable explosion of health-care costs with an aging population and new technology as well as the concern for rapidly rising Medicaid and state employee health-care costs.

“I have a personal interest in better health. I am acutely aware of the difference in the quality of life between active, healthy aging and growing steadily more fragile and limited because I fail to take care of myself,” Gingrich said.

Gingrich, who founded the Center for Health Transformation, said the current health system can’t be reformed because it is outdated and focuses on acute care instead of wellness, early detection and prevention. He suggested changes that include a faster transfer of knowledge from science laboratories and health-care professionals to individuals and populations, the adoption of top-quality information technology systems and making patients the center of the health-care system to inspire them to take personal responsibility for achieving the longest life with the best health.

“He impressed people to some degree, including me, who had some bias on what his stance would be. He didn’t sound like either a Democrat or Republican. He sounded like a bright-thinking individual who wanted to do what was best for our country’s health system,” said Dr. Gordon Deckert, a David Ross Boyd Professor Emeritus of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at OU and a member of the State Board of Health.

“He told me personally that Oklahoma could become a model for the rest of the country. It was a very useful meeting.”

Guests at the roundtable were given copies of Gingrich’s book compliments of the OU College of Public Health.

The former speaker met with Dean Gary Raskob of the College of Public Health and key state stakeholders who included Dr. Michael Crutcher, commissioner, Oklahoma State Department of Health; Dr. Gordon Deckert, member and chairman, Policy Committee, Oklahoma State Board of Health; Mike Fogarty, chief executive, Oklahoma Health Care Authority; Howard Hendrick, director, Oklahoma Department of Human Services; Dean Gandy, executive director, and Mike Samis, chairman, University Hospitals Authority and Trust; Craig Jones, president, Oklahoma Hospital Association; and Matt Robinson, vice president Small Business and Workforce Development, The State Chamber.

The deans of the OU colleges of Allied Health, Medicine and Nursing also took part.

Mary Pointer, president, Western Heights School Board Foundation, and a member of the OU College of Public Health Advisory Board, and Dr. Gary Raskob, dean of the college, discuss public health issues with former U.S. Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, right, at a March roundtable meeting at the OU College of Public Health.

Gradual Geminn and more than 100 graduate students from the OU College of Public Health walked into Oklahoma Memorial Union’s Meacham Auditorium in May with a sense of accomplishment, excitement and relief.

“This is the first time in 20 years I haven’t been going to school and it’s the best feeling ever. I’m not going to lie,” said Geminn, who earned a master’s degree in Health Administration.

“It’s definitely worth it. Without a master’s, it would have been extremely difficult, if not impossible, (to get a job),”

At the ceremony, which was held May 13, school officials presented degrees in seven areas of public health.

The areas were General Public Health, Public Health Preparedness and Terrorism, Biostatistics, Epidemiology, Health Promotion Sciences, and Occupational and Environmental Health as well as Certificates of Public Health, which had the largest group of students with 36.
Dean Gary Raskob presented convocation speaker Congressman Tom Cole, R-Oklahoma 4th District, who spoke about the importance of public health and the role the 2006 graduates will play in improving health for Oklahomans.

“He emphasized the importance of getting the community involved and being more aware of the public health situation,” Raskob said. “These are both critical components if we are to help the state of Oklahoma as a whole become healthier and help Oklahomans understand the importance of making healthy choices in lifestyle and behaviors.”

Thirteen out of the 114 students who participated in graduation earned their degrees with a 4.0 grade-point average.

Also at the ceremony were Oklahoma Secretary of Health Terry Cline, Ph.D., and Oklahoma Commissioner of Health Michael Crutcher, M.D., as well as representatives of the College of Public Health Student Association, Crimson Club members from the college and officers of the College of Public Health Alumni Association.

“Graduates from our programs leave with a combination of skills and perspectives that will be of great value to many different health programs and settings,” said Dr. Peter Budetti, chairman of the Department of Health Administration and Policy.

“Those who go to work in public health agencies help address the national shortage of public health workers with formal training in public health, and also have the background for taking on the management roles they are likely to find themselves in. Our graduates contribute to the health of Oklahomans and others throughout the country, and increasingly throughout the world.”

Graduates from the OU College of Public Health listen to presenters during the graduation ceremony in May.

U.S. Rep. Tom Cole, R-Oklahoma 4th District, talks to graduates about the importance of public health in today’s society and why they must get involved in their communities.
Take the stairs instead of the elevator; it just might add a year to your life. Pack an apple for lunch instead of a cookie and you might stave off diabetes. Simple steps toward a healthier lifestyle can make a huge difference.

To illustrate these points to the community, OU’s College of Public Health and Central Oklahoma Turning Point teamed up this year during Oklahoma Wellness Week April 3 through 7 in conjunction with National Public Health Week.

“The goal was to raise awareness about how Oklahomans can change to a healthy lifestyle,” said Sue Hale, co-chair of Central Oklahoma Turning Point and executive editor of The Oklahoman.

A major focus of the week was to encourage families to take an active role in overall wellness by eating more healthful foods and exercising more.

With problems such as obesity, diabetes, depression and tobacco-related illnesses plaguing both Oklahoma and the nation, OU College of Public Health Dean Gary Raskob said many leaders in the state saw the need to guide the public toward healthier lifestyle choices.

“Change is not easy. Yet when it comes to poor health choices that are at the root of such health issues as obesity, diabetes and heart disease, change is critical,” Raskob said.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Center for Health Statistics, 30 percent of U.S. adults 20 years of age and older – more than 60 million people – are obese. The CDC also reports the percentage of young people who are overweight has more than tripled since 1980.

Another health issue, tobacco, kills about 6,000 Oklahomans each year and is the leading cause of preventable deaths, according to the Oklahoma State Department of Health.

To bring the message of living healthy to the public, Wellness
Week kicked off with a health fair at the AT&T Bricktown Ballpark in Oklahoma City. The fair featured booths with general information about health, a body-mass-index screening and recruitment information.

During Wellness Week, the College of Public Health hosted Grand Rounds featuring a variety of speakers, including Howard Hendrick, director of the Oklahoma Department of Human Services; Peter Townsley, chief executive of Corporate Health Services; Terry Cline, Ph.D., secretary of health and commissioner for the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services; Jack Chow, M.D., special envoy of the director-general for the World Health Organization; and Oklahoma Attorney General Drew Edmondson. Topics ranged from children’s health to workplace wellness to the impact of global health issues.

“We are attempting through Gov. Henry’s Strong and Healthy Oklahoma Initiative to coordinate these efforts and provide tools for improvement that will result in a healthier Oklahoma. We need to get ahead of the curve,” Cline said.

The partnership between the college, Central Oklahoma Turning Point and The Oklahoman helped Wellness Week reach a large segment of the population. The college was able to spread its public health mission to a broader audience with special pullout sections and multimedia provided by The Oklahoman, Hale said.

“Every organization has a focus that ties in with health in one way or another, from cutting health costs for employees to being a provider in various health areas,” Hale said. “Partnerships make us all stronger and better informed.”

Hale said plans for next year’s Wellness Week already are underway.

“We are looking at ways to expand the fair and for additional corporate and private partners to reach a larger audience,” Hale said.
Public Health:

A Student’s Perspective

From the nation’s capital to the forefront of obesity prevention in children – it has been an interesting journey for Amanda Cash.

The OU College of Public Health doctoral student now hopes she can help save children from the health burdens caused by being overweight. In fact, Cash’s work already has led to the implementation of a pilot program to prevent obesity in children at four Oklahoma City elementary schools. Cash, who has run two marathons, realized early the importance of changing behavior as a result of her family’s struggle with weight.

“Many members of my family have health problems and are overweight,” Cash said. “Had my family made better lifestyle choices, they might not have the poor health outcomes they have now.”

What makes Cash’s elementary school program unique is its multifaceted approach to prevention from changing school lunches to involving parents. She believes this all-encompassing approach will make the program a success.

“That’s what public health is; it’s population-based health, focusing more on prevention than treatment,” she explained. “We want to keep people from getting sick altogether. It is a much more economical way to look at health care.”

Cash is originally from Texas, but had been working in Washington, D.C., as a grants coordinator at the Association of Schools of Public Health. After graduating with a bachelor’s degree from the University of Houston in 1997, Cash wanted to go back to school, yet was unsure of what to study.

Her work at the ASPH sparked her interest in public health. Her job also took her to many of the nation’s colleges of public health. Although she originally wanted to stay on the East Coast, a visit to OU’s College of Public Health changed her plans.

“All of the faculty were really personable and friendly,” Cash said. “OU has a tremendous amount of research, but also has a friendly and supportive atmosphere for students.”

It was the opportunity to follow her cause that cemented Cash’s decision to attend OU.

“My interest was in obesity prevention and later, when I met with Dean Raskob, he gave me direction to start the research,” Cash said. “It was a huge opportunity to be able to tailor my own research project.”

Cash worked in the summer of 2006 for Grantmakers in Health, an organization that is a resource center for health philanthropy. She wrote a compendium of philanthropic initiatives addressing obesity, which may be published this fall in the Journal of Health Affairs.

Cash said students looking to further their education should consider the OU College of Public Health as a great option, especially because of the devoted faculty. Cash, who served as president of the College of Public Health’s Student Association from 2003 to 2005 and also chaired the Interdisciplinary Learning Committee for OU’s Health Sciences Center, also urges students to get involved.

“Because of my involvement I made tremendous contacts and it enriched my experience,” Cash said. “I received a high-quality education that put me ahead of the game. I could not have asked for a better opportunity than what I’ve been given here at OU.”

A student eats a healthy snack during school.
Stepping Up to Leadership

With the OU College of Public Health on the verge of a new era, this year’s officers of the college’s Student Association will get a unique opportunity to make a difference.

Student Association President Leanna Fox said her group plans to participate fully in the college’s new Strategic Plan to make sure the student voice is part of any change.

“Students’ opinions need to be expressed and students should have a say because they are the people who utilize the services from the university,” Fox said. “Students have a different perspective than the faculty or dean would. They have the hands-on experience. They are the ones who actually do the classes and are students at the college.”

Fox, along with Vice President John Meyer, Secretary Melinda Frank and Treasurer Summer Frank, plan to spend this school year designing new ways to get College of Public Health students involved, which is a difficult task since many students have families and full-time jobs. Fox said the group plans to organize community service activities and social events as part of their commitment to public service, which is a core value of the college and an integral part of preparing students to be the best public health professionals — the best citizens — they can be.

“We’re trying to get students more involved so it can feel more like a cohesive community. A lot of the students are not traditional and we want them to feel welcome, and we want them to be aware of the resources available to them. We want them to network and get to know each other and the staff. It’s important for the experience in graduate school,” Fox said.

The 2006-2007 officers for the OU College of Public Health Student Association are Leanna Fox, (front) president; John Meyer, vice president; Summer Frank, (top left) treasurer; and Melinda Frank, secretary.

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**OU College of Public Health Student Association**

**Officers 2006-2007**

- **Leanna Fox, president**
  - Age: 23
  - Hometown: Temple Hills, Md.
  - Major: Master’s degree in public health with an emphasis in epidemiology
  - Graduation: May 2007

- **John Meyer, vice president**
  - Age: 26
  - Hometown: Paullina, Iowa.
  - Major: Master’s degree in public health with an emphasis on epidemiology
  - Graduation: Fall 2007

- **Melinda Frank, secretary**
  - Age: 27
  - Hometown: Newcomb, N.M. (Navajo Nation)
  - Major: Master’s degree in public health with an emphasis in epidemiology
  - Graduation: Summer or Fall 2007

- **Summer Frank, treasurer**
  - Age: 29
  - Hometown: Jenks, Okla.; attended high school at Putnam City North High School
  - Major: Master’s degree in biostatistics
  - Graduation: May 2008
PUBLIC HEALTH

IN ACTION

University of Oklahoma College of Public Health

Preparedness and Emergency Response
On Sept. 5, 2005, Dr. Dan Boatright, associate dean for Public Health Practice, and a team of four others made their way to the Houston Astrodome. What greeted them there was a scene that would truly test their training as well as their physical and mental fortitude — 25,000 to 30,000 displaced Gulf Coast residents who were hungry, tired and grieving.

“Everybody’s life had been reduced to a 2-foot by 6-foot space — the size of a cot and plastic bags which carried everything they owned,” said Boatright, who is also director for the Southwest Center for Public Health Preparedness.

His counterpart at the University of Texas Health Sciences Center in Houston had called at 3 p.m. the day before to ask Boatright to assemble a team to assist with relief efforts. The next day, a team of faculty including Drs. Paul Woodson, Brenda Elledge, Rod Clinkenbeard, Robert Vincent and Boatright had boarded a plane to Houston and soon were in place.

At the Astrodome, families, the elderly and people with disabilities packed the stadium floor. Single people lined up their cots in the upper levels.

The OU team spent an exhausting six days handling rapid health assessments for hurricane evacuees, conducting one-to-one interviews with 6,000 to 8,000 people, looking for signs of illness, injury or stress. They tried to get those in need of medical attention to the triage area, which proved difficult.

“People were reluctant to leave their cots because things disappeared,” Boatright said.

The team found a lot of people just wanted to get much-needed answers to questions about emergency relief and lodging. Unfortunately, those answers often proved elusive.

“It was overwhelming in the sense that the whole region of the Gulf Coast had been so dramatically impacted. To respond and provide everything needed to sustain those displaced was a major task,” he said. “Lots of elderly were on medications in New Orleans, but left without those medications and didn’t know which medications they were on.”

Because the Astrodome had been empty for three years, its bathroom facilities were not completely functional. There was no place for people to do laundry, so they would wear clothes until they couldn’t stand to be in them anymore, he said.
Boatright said the need for better-trained disaster volunteers was among many lessons learned in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

“When something bad happens in a community, people want to help,” Boatright said. “We had as many volunteers as we had displaced persons, but a large segment of volunteers were not trained to help.”

The Southwest Center for Public Health Preparedness now is working to better prepare the volunteer workforce for emergency response work through programs at libraries, community colleges and other community agencies.

Boatright said the OU team witnessed the awe-inspiring power of the human spirit in spite of the bleakness of circumstance for evacuees at the Astrodome.

“It was incredible how resilient those folks were,” Boatright said. “They were just happy to have someplace to be that was safe.”

When disaster strikes, public health professionals play a critical role, and ensuring they have the necessary training is the role of the Southwest Center for Public Health Preparedness. It is one of 27 academic centers nationwide devoted to public health preparedness. Funded by the CDC, it serves an area that encompasses Oklahoma, New Mexico, north Texas and Colorado.

“Our mission is to enhance the level of preparedness and emergency response for the public health workforce,” said Dan Boatright, Ph.D., director of the center and associate dean for Public Health Practice at the OU College of Public Health.

Initially focused heavily on bio-terrorism, the Southwest Center now trains for all hazards, both natural and man-made.

“Often the public health impacts that come from those events are exactly the same,” Boatright said.

The center’s faculty has trained more than 10,000 people across four states. Its home within the College of Public Health also has led to one of the nation’s first master’s degree programs in public health preparedness and bioterrorism.

The center also is looking at ways to better train volunteers. Boatright explained while the desire to help may be strong, volunteers must be properly trained before heading into a crisis for their own safety. For instance, certain inoculations may be needed to protect their health.

“When it comes down to it, all disasters are local and the folks directly involved in the first hours are going to be local,” Boatright added. “So it makes sense for everyone to have a basic understanding of fundamental preparedness concepts.”

“When something bad happens in a community, people want to help.”

Dan Boatright, Ph.D.

Above: Clothing and other items stood in piles, awaiting distribution to hurricane evacuees. Top Left: Cots lining the Astrodome floor became temporary “homes” for hurricane evacuees. Lower Left: Dr. Dan Boatright, associate dean for Public Health Practice, and a team of four colleagues made their way to the Houston Astrodome.
Researchers and faculty at the OU College of Public Health are on the frontlines in the war against terrorism. Their weapons are not traditional ones, but instead these researchers are arming the nation with scientific knowledge about the methods terrorists employ.

“We are using our science to have a better understanding of potential threats so we can have more effective prevention and response measures,” said James L. Regens, Ph.D., associate dean for research and professor of occupational and environmental health.

Regens also is director of the Center for Biosecurity Research. Funded by the Defense Threat Reduction Agency and the CDC, the center conducts interdisciplinary research aimed at enhancing protection against biological weapons and improving homeland security. In addition, its work may prove critical in halting emerging infectious diseases.

Its research projects focus on two main areas: biomedical applications and threat characterization. In the first area, laboratory studies examine cells under attack from such harmful microorganisms as Anthrax. This research involves collaboration with the OU College of Public Health's Department of Occupational Health as well as the Department of Immunology and Microbiology at the OU College of Medicine.

“We’re producing some very interesting results focusing on Anthrax,” Regens said.

Using models and simulations, he explained the center can track the dispersion of biological and chemical weapons through the air and into the human airways. In addition to the implications for the war on terrorism, these studies also provide important insight into how Avian Flu, SARS and influenza are spread.

“The same kinds of measures we are taking to enhance our public health infrastructure and to better identify and deal with emerging infectious diseases will help us to deter, prepare for and respond to any type of biological terrorism or pandemic outbreak,” Regens added.

The Biosecurity Center’s research also spans the broad spectrum of chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and explosive incidents (abbreviated to researchers as CBRNE).

The psychological impact of outbreaks is another area of interest for Biosecurity Center researchers. A dozen faculty, three post-doctoral fellows and five graduate research assistants are involved with projects at the center.

“The ultimate goal is to come up with more effective protection and preventative measures and to advance human health,” Regens said.
The OU College of Public Health will be the first in the country to undergo accreditation with new strict guidelines from the Council on Education for Public Health. Representatives from the council, which is the premier accrediting organization, will visit the school Dec. 11 through 13 to judge whether the university meets its outcome-based accreditation standards.

If approved, the college will receive accreditation for seven years and remain one of only 38 colleges of public health to be accredited by the CEPH.

“Accreditation is absolutely critical. The way we go about things may become what CEPH expects from schools,” said Dr. David Johnson, associate dean of academic affairs.

Johnson said school officials chose to be judged under the new guidelines to avoid having to resubmit their volumes of information again in one year. The choice also is part of Dean Gary Raskob’s idea to be “out in front whenever we can.”

OU Leads the Way in Public Health Accreditation

Prior to CEPH’s visit in December, the school must submit a final report that includes a self-study, information on staffing, infrastructure and academic programs and a list of outcomes from the last three years. They submitted a preliminary report in July.

“It’s a tremendous amount of effort among the whole faculty, students, student leaders and practice partners, but in the end it benefits the whole school,” Johnson said.

Johnson said the accreditation process, especially the self-study, will work well with the school’s focus on improvement through its comprehensive Strategic Plan.

Since the school was last accredited in 1999, it “has undergone tremendous change. It’s fair to say we are emerging into a leadership position among mid-sized schools,” Johnson said.

“Our target is to score 100 percent. Other schools are going to be watching us.”

“Dean Raskob’s active involvement in these critical public health efforts at the national level is a tribute to his leadership and to the high caliber of the OU College of Public Health,” said Joseph Ferretti, Ph.D., senior vice president and provost of the OU Health Sciences Center. “I am proud that his involvement will ensure our concerns are aired and our expertise is available to help address the difficult public health issues currently facing our nation.”

Raskob and others from ASPH worked with the U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee on a bill to strengthen the preparedness training for public health professionals. They also worked with Congress to allow a portion of the funding set aside from the 2006 Iraqi War Appropriations bill to be used to enhance the flu program planning efforts and the existing preparedness training network at established CDC centers for public health preparedness and accredited schools of public health.

Dean Raskob also is a member of the ASPH Board of Directors and co-chairs the ASPH Indian Health Service Taskforce. Priorities of the taskforce include creating partnerships between schools of public health and American Indian and Alaskan Native communities in the areas of public health workforce development and prevention research. In May, he traveled to Washington, D.C., to meet with Charles Grim, director of Indian Health Services.
Dr. Helene Carabin has ridden crocodiles in West Africa, eaten them in South Africa and collected specimens from dogs, cats, cattle, pigs, rats and people in the Philippines, all in the name of research.

The associate professor of biostatistics and epidemiology at the OU College of Public Health traverses the world hunting parasites known as Taenia solium and Schistosoma japonicum. Taenia solium is a tapeworm that attacks pigs. If the pig’s meat is not cooked properly, the worm’s eggs can transfer to people, where they hatch and migrate to muscles, eyes or the brain. The condition in the brain is called Neurocysticercosis and can cause epileptic seizures.

Researchers estimate there are millions of cases of Neurocysticercosis, but most are undocumented, as are risk factors. Since the time from infection to the first appearance of symptoms can be years, OU researchers said most people infected with the worm are unaware of their condition until it becomes serious.

About 70 to 90 percent of patients develop seizures. Other symptoms include severe headaches, intracranial pressure and difficulty with balance.

The worm also is an economic burden for many developing countries, including Mexico, where Carabin plans to visit this fall. Travel and global migration have helped the preventable disease spread worldwide, including to the United States, where cases have increased. Oklahoma, too, has seen an increase in Neurocysticercosis.

“The developing world will develop with more knowledge,” she said. “Where I can contribute is helping them do their own research.”

It is not surprising that Carabin’s interest is global. She grew up in Montreal, Quebec, a diverse city that is bilingual with French and English.

She earned master’s and doctoral degrees in Montreal, embarked on her post-doctoral work at Oxford University and Imperial College in London, and joined the faculty at the OU College of Public Health in 2002.

When Carabin travels to other nations to assess their parasite problem, she is looking at more than the parasites’ existence. She and fellow researchers from the college, including Dr. Linda Cowan, are designing the template for the research process itself, then coordinating with local chiefs and commune leaders to improve the villagers’ conditions even after the scientists leave.

“We’re trying to find the best way with local resources to conduct very valid research,” Carabin said.

Carabin added that one of her goals is to help Oklahomans and Americans understand that problems in Tanzania or rural Mexico aren’t isolated anymore. Incidents such as the rapid spreading of the SARS virus demonstrate how global the world has become.

To help drive that point home, Carabin takes a student from the college with her when funding allows. She said for many students, seeing a world where mothers worry every day about whether they will be able to feed their children provides a new perspective.

“Every time I go there I realize I was lucky to be born in Montreal,” Carabin said.

“How do we reduce that gap between us and them? We may not make a big difference, but we are going to try.”
Some of the most influential leaders in Oklahoma’s public health community are among the members of a new advisory board for the OU College of Public Health.

Dean Gary Raskob created the board to bring together city and state health officials with community and business leaders.

“The first reason for the creation of the advisory board is to provide external, independent review of the college’s initiatives and progress and to advise the college on current and future strategic directions,” Raskob said.

“Secondly, it is to provide a forum to bring together leaders of state and city-county health agencies, the business community, alumni and community organizations to foster a partnership approach to solving some of the public health problems of Oklahoma.”

Raskob added the number of influential leaders who have agreed to serve on the advisory board shows the importance of public health in Oklahoma.

Gary Cox, director of the Tulsa City-County Health Department, said he hopes the advisory board will offer “real-world” experience and advice for the academic side of public health with the same goal of improving the health status of Oklahomans.

“The main thing is to be a resource and an advocate in the dean’s agenda of working toward improving health outcomes of Oklahomans. At the end of the day, that’s what it’s all about,” Cox said. “I hope to bring some practical advice and synergy for all of us working toward those goals.”

Cox said the joint effort also will help local and state health officials stay in sync with OU on what types of graduates they need in the Oklahoma public health market, which is about to lose a significant portion of its workforce to retirement.

Dr. Paul Dungan, director of the Oklahoma City-County Health Department, said board members will assess how well the college is accomplishing the mission described in “Strategic Plan 2006-2010” and offer specific recommendations based on practical knowledge from various backgrounds.

“The advisory board is drawn from a broad spectrum of community leaders in industry, government and community advocacy as well as academia. This is intended to offer the College of Public Health a broader assessment of its effectiveness,” Dungan said.

Dungan and Cox are among 29 members of the advisory board.
Gordon Deckert, M.D.
Board member and chairman, Policy Committee, Oklahoma State Board of Health

“In my opinion, the Department of Health and the College of Public Health have very good reasons to collaborate. The board, which is the governing body of the Health Department, clearly needs the research capacity of the college to provide data to make appropriate decisions. For that reason, I was pleased to be appointed to the advisory board.”

Leslie Hudson, Ph.D.
Community volunteer and OU College of Public Health alumnus

“Almost every major issue faced by Oklahomans relates directly or indirectly to public health issues. Bringing these community leaders from around the state to interface and advise the College of Public Health puts it in a unique position to have a dramatic impact in the short and long term.”

Ken Lackey
Chairman and chief executive, The Nordam Group, Tulsa

“Employee health costs are a rapidly rising, seemingly out-of-control, expense for Nordam and many other Oklahoma businesses. We’ve tried the simple solutions, such as limiting alternatives, restricting benefits and asking our employees to pay more for their health insurance.

The only long-term solution is healthier employees, and that is where the University of Oklahoma College of Public Health plays a vital role. It must assist in the development of innovative health care programs, educate the general public about the benefits of good health and healthy lifestyles and train the professionals required to improve the health of our state.”
Like a complicated game of connect the dots, OU College of Public Health alumna Pamela Williams devotes her working hours to making the right connections with the community and the media. Her goal is to improve understanding of public health initiatives.

Williams is the public information officer for the Oklahoma State Department of Health. It was her desire to inform the community about their health that originally led her to the OU College of Public Health.

While working at the Oklahoma Department of Human Services, Williams became very interested in health-care reform and health-care costs. One of the directors recommended Williams further her education at OU’s College of Public Health. She received her master of public health degree (M.P.H.) in 1994. Williams credits her graduate work with providing her a more in-depth knowledge of health care issues.

“It gave me a broader understanding and helps me to get the right person lined up for an interview with a reporter and what message the health department wants to get across,” she said.

Now as president of the college’s Alumni Association, a position she has held since 2005, Williams realizes the college continues to play an important role in advancing her goals.

“I believe it is always good to stay connected to the college,” she said. “Lately there have been a lot of public health crises with the testing for Anthrax and Hurricane Katrina and we ended up being a major player. You need to find people quickly when disaster occurs and it’s always good to have both formal and informal networks.”

Williams urged other graduates to join the Alumni Association and support both its scholarship and mentor programs. The mentor program matches an alumnus with a student, much like an internship.

“The College of Public Health is a young college and we’re trying to find alums and urge them to get back in touch with the college,” Williams said. “I’d like for them to reach out and get connected.”

Join the College of Public Health Alumni Association

The purpose of this association is to unite Public Health alumni and supporters of the University of Oklahoma College of Public Health in an active organization to contribute to the advancement and excellence of the College of Public Health, University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center, and the practice of public health. The major objectives of this association are to:

- Promote fellowship among the members of the association, public health professionals, students and with members of all recognized health-care professions.
- Cooperate with and actively support the goals and activities of the Oklahoma Public Health Association and other similar state and national organizations.
- Initiate activities to improve Public Health practice and education and to actively cooperate with the OPHA, other recognized health professional associations, lay and governmental leaders and groups to this same end.
- Enhance and sustain continued communication between members of the association and the College of Public Health.

To obtain an application form to join the Alumni Association and more information about upcoming events, click on the Alumni tab at http://www.coph.ouhsc.edu/coph. For other membership information, contact Vivian Glore at: (405) 271-2700 or by e-mail at Vivian-Glore@ouhsc.edu.
Adams, Andréa (Barker) (‘02 M.P.H. Biostatistics), married Steve Adams on July 3. Barker is a health policy analyst at the OU Health Sciences Center’s Department of Family Medicine. Steve and Andi are expecting their first child in November.

Chit, Khin Thingyan (‘04 M.P.H. Industrial Hygiene), currently is a research associate for the Aberdeen Area Tribal Chairmen’s Health Board. She works for the 18 tribes in South Dakota, North Dakota, Nebraska and Iowa.

Dragoo, Susan (Ketring) (‘01 M.S.), completed the Lean Healthcare Certificate program at the University of Michigan in November of 2005. Dragoo is a vice president at Integris Health in Oklahoma City.

Hall, Geri Toyekoyah (‘04 M.P.H.), was promoted to Regional Program Operations Manager for the CDC in Charlotte, N.C., in October of 2005. Hall supervises the HIV/STD program that includes the Charlotte region and the Black Mountain regions of western North Carolina.

Heater, Belinda “Buffy” L. (‘04 M.P.H.), is a planning manager with the Oklahoma Health Care Authority. She successfully led the development and implementation of the O-EPIC (Insure Oklahoma) program assisting small businesses with insurance coverage.

Shetty, Veena (‘03 M.P.H. Biostatistics and Epidemiology), found a job after graduation working as a statistician for the National Institute on Aging. Veena lives in Baltimore.

Smith, Katy Duncan (‘01 M.S. Biostatistics and Epidemiology), welcomed daughter Jane Caroline Duncan Goza into the world on Jan. 3.

Payne, Howard W., Jr. (‘93 M.H.A.), was appointed assistant professor of public health sciences at the Baylor College of Dentistry/Texas A&M University System Health Science Center of Dallas in October of 2005.

Roy, Jess T. (‘98 M.P.H.), finished his residency in family medicine as chief resident in June of 2004 at the OU College of Medicine-Tulsa.

Williams, Keith (‘94 M.P.H., ’97 Ph.D. Biostatistics and Epidemiology), is an associate professor at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences. He lives in Little Rock, Ark. Keith also was a presenter at the first Roy M. Deal Biostatistics Symposium at the OU College of Public Health in June.

Burgess, Cathleen A., Ltc. (‘88 M.P.H.), presently is assigned to Fort Bliss, El Paso, Texas, and recently was awarded the Order of Medical Military Merit and Meritorious Service Medal. She previously was assigned to Walter Reed Medical Center in Washington, D.C.

Phillips, Janice E. (Hayes) (‘81 M.P.H.), has retired and now volunteers with church and the Multiple Sclerosis Society. She lives in Oklahoma City and is a member of the Red Hat Society.

Wharton, David F. (‘83 M.P.H.), was selected in July 2005 as the Diabetes Case Manager for the new Choctaw Nation Health Services Clinic in Idabel. He also coordinates the Governmental Performance and Results Act preventative health indicators program for Choctaw Nation Health Services. David and wife Betty (‘80 M.S. OU College of Nursing) live in Broken Bow.

Ferguson, Stanley W. (‘70 Ph.D. Biostatistics and Epidemiology), has retired from the University of Colorado School of Medicine.

Lancaster, Barbara Jeanette (‘77 Ph.D. Human Ecology), assumed the presidency of the American Association of Colleges of Nursing. She has served as the dean of the University of Virginia School of Nursing since 1989.

Lott, Antone L. (‘75 Ph.D. Industrial Hygiene), moved to Florida this year. He has spent seven years with Texaco and BP,
Dr. Barbara Alving, acting director of the National Institutes of Health’s National Center for Research Resources, visited the OU Health Sciences Center in February to talk about the creation of national heart-healthy campaigns, lessons learned from the Women’s Health Initiative and NIH’s Roadmap for public health funding.

Alving, who spoke as part of OU’s Public Health Grand Rounds, said one of the most important issues facing public health professionals today is the accurate and prompt delivery of health information to the public. She said a good example of a successful public awareness campaign is the Red Dress Project for cardiovascular health.

“Some unhappy women came to see my then-boss and they said, ‘It’s time you did something for women. You are always talking about men with heart disease, but women are important too,’” Alving said.

NIH officials agreed and created an outreach program that started with a fashion show in New York, where designers chose red dresses to represent heart disease. The dresses drew the attention of the American Heart Association, whose officials started the “Go Red” campaign.

These campaigns largely are credited for the increase in awareness of heart disease among women. According to surveys by the American Heart Association, the percentage of women who spontaneously identified heart disease as the number one killer of women increased from 30 percent in 1997 to 46 percent in 2003. More than 480,000 women die from heart disease each year.

Alving said another program designed to improve women’s health, the Women’s Health Initiative, helped the NIH devise new methods of communication after the results from the initiative’s first hormone therapy trial were released to some institutions, including the media, before personal doctors received data.

On funding, Alving said new grant programs and the expansion of existing NIH programs offer a chance for Oklahoma researchers and students to find more money and develop innovative approaches.
A.F. Al-Assaf, M.D.*, M.P.H.
Associate Dean for International Health

Dr. Al-Assaf is a physician and a consultant in preventive medicine and quality management. He is a Presbyterian Health Foundation Presidential Professor and has consulted with different health-care facilities and organizations such as the U.S. Air Force, U.S. Veterans Affairs Health System, U.S. Agency for International Development, the World Bank and the World Health Organization. He provides research, guidance and education in areas of quantitative and qualitative management.

* Doctor in Medicine and Surgery degree, University of Baghdad Medical College, Iraq.

David L. Johnson, Ph.D.
Associate Dean for Academic Affairs

Dr. Johnson began his career as a sanitary engineer and industrial hygienist with the U.S. Army Medical Service Corps. He has served in various leadership positions in the American Industrial Hygiene Association, including president of the Oklahoma chapter. He advises all new M.P.H. students and directs student thesis and dissertation research. His personal research interests include occupational and environmental hazard exposure assessment, indoor environmental quality and bioaerosol generation, characterization and control.

Daniel T. Boatright, Ph.D.
Associate Dean for Public Health Practice

Dr. Boatright is a Presidential Professor of Occupational and Environmental Health and director of the Southwest Center for Public Health Preparedness at the OU College of Public Health. Dr. Boatright has held credentials as a visiting scientist at Los Alamos National Laboratory for 10 years and serves on a wide variety of national boards, committees and councils. He holds bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral degrees in environmental health. He joined the College of Public Health in 1990.

James L. Regens, Ph.D.
Associate Dean for Research

Dr. Regens is director of the Center for Biosecurity Research and a professor of occupational and environmental health at the OU College of Public Health. Regens specializes in risk assessment, modeling/simulation and decision analysis. His research focuses on chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and explosives terrorism countermeasures; transmission dynamics for infectious diseases; and environmental health. Regens has been the principal investigator for $30 million in research funding and is the author of more than 200 publications, including eight books.
Regens Elected to Life long Post on Council of Foreign Relations

James L. Regens, Ph.D., recently was elected life member of the Council of Foreign Relations. The council is the preeminent national, nongovernmental organization and nonpartisan center for scholars dedicated to producing and disseminating ideas so policymakers, journalists and interested citizens in the United States and around the globe can better understand foreign policy choices. The council’s main goal is to energize foreign policy discussions nationwide and encourage broader debates of international affairs and U.S. foreign policy. Regens is associate dean for research at the College of Public Health, director of the Center for Biosecurity Research and professor in Occupational and Environmental Health.

Faculty News

The following faculty members have been promoted or received tenure:
Amir Khaliq, Ph.D., associate professor, Health Administration and Policy.
Roy Oman, Ph.D., professor, Health Promotion Sciences.
Helene Carabin, Ph.D., associate professor with tenure, Biostatistics and Epidemiology.

Vesely Named Presidential Professor

OU President David Boren recently named Sara Vesely, Ph.D., as a presidential professor. The honor is reserved for faculty who meet the highest standards of excellence in scholarship and teaching. Vesely is an associate professor in Biostatistics and Epidemiology. She also is an alumna of OU’s College of Public Health, earning her doctorate in biostatistics from the college in 1998.

Henderson Receives Prevention Award

J. Neil Henderson, Ph.D., received the 2006 Leadership Prevention Award for Native American Health from Loma Linda University School of Public Health. Henderson serves on an Association of Schools of Public Health committee addressing illness prevention and health disparities among minorities. An associate professor and vice chair in Health Promotion Sciences, he has served as faculty adviser for the Native American Public Health Student Association since 2001 and is a member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma.

Thompson’s Paper Named Best

David Thompson, Ph.D., was awarded Best Contributed Paper for his work titled, “Performing Latent Class Analysis Using the CATMOD Procedure.” The paper was honored at the SAS Users’ Group International Annual meeting, held in March in San Francisco. Thompson is an assistant professor in the Department of Biostatistics and Epidemiology and also serves as associate director of the Bioinformatics and Data Management Center.

Regens Elected to Life long Post on Council of Foreign Relations
Public Health

Calendar of Events for 2006-2007

November
3 through 8
APHA/ASPH Annual Meeting, Boston Convention and Exposition Center.

6
Reception for COPH alumni and friends, Boston Convention and Expo Center, Room 252A, 6:30 to 8 p.m. Please join us!

16
College of Public Health Alumni Association Quarterly Program. Faculty House, Oklahoma City, 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.

28
Public Health Grand Rounds, “Emerging Infectious Disease Issues in Oklahoma,” featuring Brett Cauthen, M.D., M.P.H., State Epidemiologist, Oklahoma State Department of Health, 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., Oklahoma City CHB 150; Tulsa SAC 3102.

December
19
COPH Holiday Reception, Presbyterian Health Foundation Food Pavilion, 825 Research Parkway, 4 to 7 p.m.

February
27
Public Health Grand Rounds, featuring Eduardo Simoes, M.D., Ph.D., M.P.H., Director, Prevention Research Centers Program, Division of Adult and Community Health, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., College of Health building.

March 2007
31
Oklahoma Wellness Week Health Fair, Oklahoma City.

April
2 through 7
National Public Health Week and Oklahoma Wellness Week.

3
Public Health Grand Rounds, O. Ray Kling Distinguished Lecture in International Health, featuring James W. Curran, M.D., M.P.H., Dean, Rollins School of Public Health, Emory University, 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., College of Health building.

4
Public Health Grand Rounds, featuring Karen Goraleski, Director, Public Health Advocacy, and Executive Director, Paul G. Rogers Society for Global Health Research, Research! America, 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., College of Health building.

5
Grapes of Health Event, Presbyterian Health Foundation Food Pavilion, 825 Research Parkway, 5 to 7 p.m.

19
Public Health Grand Rounds, featuring Harvey Fineberg, M.D., Ph.D., President, Institute of Medicine, 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., College of Health building.

College of Public Health spring advisory board meeting.

May
12
University of Oklahoma commencement.

13
College of Public Health convocation.

For additional information, visit the College of Public Health Web site at www.ouhsc.edu or contact Vivian Glore, Assistant Dean, Alumni Affairs and Community Relations, at (405) 271-2700 or e-mail Vivian-Glore@ouhsc.edu.