Winter 2013-2014

A Publication for Alumni and Friends of the University of Oklahoma College of Public Health

OU Public Health

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

Today, more than ever, a well-prepared public health workforce is vital. The dramatic rise in health care costs is driving many of the reform efforts currently taking place in this country. There also is growing recognition that a stronger focus on public health is essential to bring costs under control.

The fact is lifestyle choices such as tobacco use, inactivity and overweight or obesity, as well as socioeconomic status and education, are bigger drivers of poor health and premature death than the medical care provided.

Many of the new payment models for health care also place additional responsibility on care providers to manage the health of their patients. The traditional disciplines within public health provide many of the tools needed to better manage population health in the United States and worldwide.

Public health graduates today are entering a workforce in which the role of public health is more broadly appreciated by government, community and business leaders. Preparing those who will make up our future public health workforce requires excellence in education and collaboration, too.

Accreditation remains the gold standard in education; increasingly, schools and programs of public health are seeking this important “seal of approval,” as are state and local health departments. There is also a new emphasis on inter-professional collaboration both in education and in practice. We are pleased to be a part of this change.

In this issue, you will learn more about the challenges of workforce development in public health and you will meet some of those who play a key role in positively impacting public health.

Sincerely,

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

Terry Cline, Ph.D.
Commissioner of Health, Oklahoma Department of Health

Oklahoma Secretary of Health and Human Services

Ensuring a well-trained public health workforce is essential to all of us and an important mission of the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center and our College of Public Health.

The college maintains an active leadership role in discussions involving key public health issues on the local, national and international levels. In fact, Dean Raskob is chair-elect of the Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health, a role that places him at the table with other top educational leaders in discussions focused on further elevating quality in public health education and advancing public health research.

The OU College of Public Health also understands the importance of helping public health leaders of tomorrow achieve their goals through education with a variety of programs. To that end, the college is making good strides in efforts to increase funding for scholarships for top students. This year, the college awarded scholarships totaling more than $42,000 to 18 deserving students.

Improved public health for our state, nation and world is the focus of both the faculty and the students at the OU College of Public Health. We take pride in their efforts.

Sincerely,

M. Dewayne Andrews, M.D., MACP
Senior Vice President and Provost
University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center

Promoting Healthier Tomorrows Through Education and Research Today
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Hiding in Plain Sight

CDC Director Shares Insights on Improved Public Health

The factors impacting public health the most in this country are often hiding in plain sight.

That was a key message shared by the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as he addressed a packed auditorium at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center in Oklahoma City.

Tom Frieden, M.D., M.P.H., shared his insights as he delivered the 2013 Edward N. Brandt Memorial Lecture. The lecture is part of Public Health Grand Rounds sponsored by the OU College of Public Health and OU Medicine.

“There are so many things that are hiding in plain sight and it is the job of those of us who work in health and public health to bring those things to the fore in ways that will promote health,” Frieden said. “Promoting health is not particularly complicated. It is about maximizing health, reducing preventable suffering — reducing preventable illness, injury, disability and death.”

He pointed out that many answers to the health problems facing Americans are literally staring us in the face if we will just examine the data.

“Often, we don’t see what is most apparent or most striking in front of us because we almost take it for granted, but we are living in the midst of a huge increase in cardiovascular morbidity and mortality,” he said. “If you look over the scope of time, even if you correct for age, there’s been a big increase in heart disease and stroke. It is by far the leading cause of death in this country. It is by far the leading cause of preventable death in this country; and it is by far the leading cause of health disparities in this country.”

Frieden said that is why the CDC, with a range of public and private partners, launched The Million Hearts Campaign. It is a campaign aimed at preventing a million heart attacks and strokes over the next five years through community prevention in the form of better tobacco control, sodium reduction and trans fat elimination, as well as through clinical prevention measures, including a focus by clinicians on what he termed the “ABCs” – aspirin, blood pressure, cholesterol and smoking cessation.

“Those four areas can save more lives than any other areas in health care,” Frieden said. “That doesn’t mean we don’t improve all over; but in those four areas, we can make a huge difference.”

The problems are clearly evident when one examines the various facts and figures related to preventable illness, injury, disability and death; but Frieden said so, too, are the solutions. For example, when evaluating health systems that show the greatest improvements, one often finds similarities.
Frieden offered blood pressure as an example. While it is estimated that some 67 million people in this country have high blood pressure, it is controlled in fewer than half (47 percent) of those. Yet, some systems have been able to achieve much higher levels of control. In examining health systems with blood pressure control in 80 to 90 percent of patients, Frieden said some common denominators emerge. First, they had focused quality measures.

“Providing quality feedback monthly improves outcomes in a year,” he said.

Next, they had solid health information systems. Frieden noted that electronic medical records may not be a solution alone but they are definitely an important component.

Finally, team-based care was another common factor in successful blood pressure control among patients.

“We know it is not only important to have information, it is important to have people who can act on it,” Frieden said.

Smoking cessation is one area where the data shows intervention is making a difference. With a new tobacco tax, expanded smoke-free laws and hard-hitting, anti-smoking ad campaigns, Frieden said the numbers on smoking are beginning to move. He pointed to preliminary national data just out that shows a rapid decrease in smoking during the past four years with about 4.5 million fewer smokers today than in 2009.
Recent graduates of schools and programs of public health are finding jobs, but employment options for those graduates have changed in recent years.

Today, many graduates are forced to look for positions outside of the traditional public health sector, said Dr. Harrison Spencer, president and CEO of the Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health.

He pointed out that just a few years ago, there was great concern in the traditional public health workforce that a large segment of workers would retire and there would not be enough new hires to fill the void. There also was great concern that the population was growing at a rate that would make the shortage even worse.

“We estimated a need of 250,000 more public health workers by 2020,” Spencer said.

However, the equation shifted.

“Mainly because federal, state and local agencies have been hit so hard by job losses with the recession, that they’re just not hiring,” Spencer said. “So, increasingly, more of our graduates are going elsewhere. We feel pretty strongly, along with our state and local partners, that the nation’s health and security have been really compromised by the kind of cutbacks that are going on. Those jobs are not being recovered.”

Fortunately for graduates, the value of a well-educated public health professional is now recognized in a growing number of circles. For that reason, Spencer said the ASPPH defines the public health force more broadly.

While most people tend to think of public health workers as those who are employed by state, local and federal health agencies, and that is certainly true for many in the profession, career options in public health are increasingly varied for today’s graduates. Health systems, non-governmental organizations and universities are just a few of the types of employment they can find after earning a degree.

“The perspectives that public health education provides around population health and prevention are really sought after in a multitude of work places,” Spencer said.

No matter how or where public health services are delivered, recipients often are more comfortable confiding in professionals who understand their culture and, of course, their language.

“I don’t think anyone has the data on specific race and ethnic groups entering the workforce and where they are going,” Spencer said. He points out that reporting and tracking have changed.

One thing is clear, however; schools and programs of public health will continue to play a critical role in helping assess the changing demands on the profession and in educating the next generation of public health researchers, workers and leaders.
Public Health Workforce Challenges: 
An Oklahoma Perspective

State, city and county public health leaders in Oklahoma know well the challenges of maintaining a quality workforce.

Meeting the ever-changing needs of the field requires an influx of culturally aware, scientifically savvy professionals. As experienced public health employees leave the public health field to pursue careers in the private sector, a void is created that public health leaders in Oklahoma say is difficult to fill. Like the population, the workforce also is aging. As they retire, new leaders are needed to take their place.

“We are aging out as a profession. This is not a problem unique to Oklahoma. It is one that impacts public health as a profession,” said Bruce Dart, director of the Tulsa Health Department.

Public health leaders in Oklahoma are seeking a new stream of qualified public health professionals – professionals with the ability to plan and evaluate programs. They also are eagerly pursuing well-trained employees from different cultures – employees who can easily relate to and communicate with the state’s diverse population.

“Our goal is to have a workforce that is in tune with the population we serve. This helps people feel more comfortable either accessing our services or interacting with us,” said Julie Cox-Kain, chief operating officer of the Oklahoma State Department of Health. “We are critically short, though, of public health workers of Native American or Hispanic descent.”

Cox-Kain said the state health department has looked at a variety of programs aimed at attracting more minority employees, particularly Native American and Hispanic employees. It also has implemented training programs to help those employees advance their public health careers within the department.

She said the good news is that state health department employees receive excellent experience and ongoing training. Unfortunately, that also makes them very attractive candidates for positions in the private sector. And keeping the best employees can also be difficult; that is especially true with state epidemiologists, disease intervention specialists and nurses.

“Our turnover rate is very high. It’s about 20 percent annually,” said Cox-Kain. “And most employees are only staying with us about four and a half years.”

In addition to the attention being focused on development of a culturally diverse workforce, public health leaders in Oklahoma also are responding to changing expectations about how public health services are delivered.

“The skill sets required for the future of public health are quite different. What we are asked to do and how we go about our business is changing,” said Gary Cox, J.D., executive director of the Oklahoma City-County Health Department. “Public health used to be tasked with direct delivery of services, and now there’s a shift to wellness-type programs and prevention of disease. There’s a stronger emphasis on partnerships to get the work done, because if you have fewer dollars, you have to depend on collaboration.”

Cox said he sees a greater emphasis on accountability and evaluation of programs, accreditation, and quality improvement. There is also a growing demand for the analysis of data to determine where health problems exist and how to intervene.

“You need folks with budgeting skills and managers with marketing skills. In the age of social media, there’s a different way of delivering health information, and you need experts to do that,” Cox said.

Despite the challenges, public health leaders in Oklahoma do see signs that provide hope for the future. Dart, who also serves as an adjunct professor at the OU College of Public Health, said he is encouraged by the quality of students now preparing for careers in public health.

“Thank goodness we have more colleges and programs of public health across the country actively working to train and recruit potential members of the work force,” he said. “At the OU College of Public Health, I see great students every day. The fact that we have this tremendous College of Public Health makes me feel more optimistic about the future.”

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“The fact that we have this tremendous College of Public Health makes me feel more optimistic about the future.”

Tulsa Health Department Director Bruce Dart
In Her Mother’s Footsteps

Student hopes to advance community health through prevention
Even as a child, Marcia Castellanos had a heart for helping people and a passion for public health. They are traits she certainly inherited from her mother, an early leader in community health efforts.

Throughout her life, Castellanos has combined these traits to excel in both her education and her career.

Castellanos currently is working toward earning her master of public health degree at the University of Oklahoma College of Public Health in hopes of using her training to better serve the growing Hispanic community in Oklahoma.

“I want to help improve the health of the Hispanic community,” she said. “I grew up assisting my mother in the Hispanic Health Fair in Oklahoma City, which she started over 20 years ago.”

Castellanos said when her mother, Maria J. Aymat-Ghigliotty, started the Hispanic Health Fair, it was small, serving about 100 people at a single location, a local church. Today, the event benefits thousands at numerous venues throughout the Oklahoma City metropolitan area.

Castellanos says she learned early of the importance of prevention through the health fairs she attended with her mother. As a girl, she loved being part of the events, helping provide free screenings and important prevention information to her community.

Building rapport with people came easily and Castellanos enjoyed caring for others. The experience left a lasting impression on her. She considered going to medical school or becoming a physician’s assistant. Instead she opted for an education and a future focused on public health prevention.

Castellanos earned a bachelor of science degree in Health and Exercise Science from OU. Her interest in that program was primarily in health promotion and wellness rather than sports. Wanting to expand her education in community wellness, she first entered the Master of Public Health program at OU in 2009. However, she temporarily put her education on hold a year later when offered the opportunity to intern at the Centers for Disease Control.

At the CDC, she worked at the National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD and TB Prevention. Castellanos and her mentor in the division, behavioral scientist Jonny Andia, Ph.D, showcased their work at the U.S. Conference on AIDS.

“Being at the CDC was an incredible learning experience,” said Castellanos, who liked collaborating with others there. “I was also able to network with so many professionals in the field of prevention.”

Upon returning to Oklahoma, Castellanos decided to resume her training – this time on the clinical side of care. She earned her bachelor of science degree in nursing from OU College of Nursing, obtained her nursing license and then worked with patients in hospital oncology and medical surgery units.

“I’m glad I became a nurse,” Castellano said. “I cared for my patients the way I would take care of my family. I liked being on the front lines with them and their families.”

Recently, though, Castellanos again turned to education to help her further her unfailing desire to help prevent disease, not just treat it. She is now again a student at the OU College of Public Health, working to complete her M.P.H. as part of a new collaboration between the college and the Oklahoma State Department of Health that targets meeting the needs of underserved populations.

So Castellanos studies at the college and also works as an apprentice at the health departments’ Center for the Advancement of Wellness. She currently is part of a project in obesity intervention through lifestyle modification, diet and physical activity.

“The people we work with at the health department value us as members of their team,” Castellano said.

Her career path has certainly been as interesting as it is unique. Yet, time and again, education has helped Castellanos continue to walk in her mother’s footsteps, serving others and helping promote wellness in her community.

“I try to take something from every experience. I look forward to using what I’ve learned to make a difference in the Hispanic community,” she said.
Dr. Dale Bratzler is adept at looking at the big picture, whether it’s through the lens of his Nikon camera or the broad scope of population health.

In his office at the College of Public Health, Bratzler displays striking black and white images of his honeymoon trip to Paris. He’s a seasoned traveler, too, having been to nearly every state as a national leader in health care quality programs.

Bratzler knows that health care quality is more important than ever in the United States and shares his knowledge of it with his public health students and with clinicians as chief quality officer for OU Physicians. His role both at the college and with the physicians group is evidence of a growing need for greater collaboration between public health and clinical care in this country.

“The dramatic rise of health care costs in the United States has been a driver for many of the reform efforts that are taking place,” he explained. “There is growing recognition that the social determinates of health – education, socioeconomic status and personal habits like tobacco use, obesity and inactivity – are greater drivers of premature death and health in the population than the medical care we give.”

Because of that, Bratzler said many of the new health care payment models place additional responsibility on care providers to manage the health of their patients.

“The traditional disciplines within public health provide many of the tools required to manage population health.”

Before joining the OU College of Public Health, Bratzler led the Oklahoma Foundation for Medical Quality and served for two terms as president of the American Health Quality Association. He said health care quality efforts are driven by consumer demand and transparency is a big focus.

“How do you get the best outcomes as well as cost?” he asks. “There is no way to continue to have the rate of medical care that we do. We are spending twice as much per capita as any industrialized nation in the world.”

Bratzler said team-based care is another major focus of efforts to improve overall health and health care outcomes.

“The old model is that the physician is the captain of the ship. That pyramid approach is giving way to a more horizontal approach,” he said.

Bratzler has a unique perspective on this paradigm shift. After a decade of private practice, he came to the OU College of
Public Health to earn a master’s of public health degree. As a physician, his own focus had always been on individual patients and their individual needs. Public health broadened that focus.

“Public Health is a science of populations, not individuals,” he said. “It is about boosting prevention and bettering health care practices to benefit all. Today, health professionals are asked to work in interdisciplinary teams, often to support patients with chronic conditions. Yet, they are usually not educated together or trained in team-based skills.”

With the increased emphasis on managing the health of a population of patients, Bratzler said it is essential for all health professional students to have an understanding of the various disciplines that can contribute to the overall health of their patients. This is leading to more interdisciplinary collaboration and innovative inter-professional education opportunities at the OU Health Sciences Center.

Bratzler knows that improved public health requires buy-in from many circles – providers, educators, individuals and policy makers, too. As president of the AHQA, he helped pass legislation allowing hospitals to vaccinate patients via a standing order, instead of requiring individual prescriptions. Another initiative was the Surgical Care Improvement Project, which aimed to reduce complications after surgery.

When his focus is not on improving public health and public health education, it is often through the lens of his camera. Bratzler admits he’s been a photography nut since medical school, taking photos for his own pleasure and for the occasional wedding.

Bratzler and his wife, Rebecca, a registered nurse, live in Oklahoma City. He has three adult children – Michelle, Erin and Nathan.
Imagine a venue in which top business, education, community and health leaders gather for serious discussions about improving public health in Oklahoma. It is not the stuff of imagination, but instead one of the regular meetings of the College of Public Health Advisory Board, a board that is a growing force in the advancement of public health policy in the state.

“The Advisory Board is one of the few places where diverse members from diverse professions – education, health care, business and the community – join together to look into the public health issues facing Oklahomans today,” said board member Murali Krishna, M.D., president of the Oklahoma State Board of Health and president and chief operating officer of INTEGRIS Mental Health.

The board has harnessed the knowledge and energy of a wide range of professionals to foster discussion and encourage collaboration. Formed initially as a group focused on advising the college on many areas of public health, including the ever-changing workforce, the board has become a vital forum for those passionate about improving the health of Oklahomans.

“The perspective from each member’s background and the wisdom they bring becomes the collective wisdom of the group,” Krishna said. “All of this becomes the driving force for change as we work to become a healthier state and to deal with challenges in a more effective and integrated manner.”
IN ACTION

ACCREditATION

University of Oklahoma College of Public Health
Work toward re-accreditation is always in full swing at the OU College of Public Health, thanks to a unique plan that keeps a constant focus on self-evaluation and educational excellence.

For four and a half decades now, the college has been a leader in this area ever since it first earned accreditation from the Council on Education for Public Health back in 1969.

“Accreditation gives us recognition for providing a very comprehensive, well-planned educational experience to prepare our students to excel in the public health field,” said Steven Mattachione, J.D., chair of the Department of Health Administration and Policy at the college. Mattachione, in collaboration with the dean, other faculty and alumni, leads the re-accreditation effort. “Accreditation provides recognition of the college’s leadership and of the college’s constant effort to strive toward excellence in public health education. It also places the OU College of Public Health among an elite group of prominent educational institutions.”

Accreditation is a mark of excellence for schools and programs of Public Health that distinguishes them from those programs that have not met the rigid accreditation standards.

“CEPH accreditation is a rigorous, peer-review process designed to assure quality public health education. The CEPH accreditation ‘seal of approval’ means the institution has demonstrated the standards necessary to prepare public health graduates to meet the demands of the 21st-century workforce,” said Dr. Harrison Spencer, president and CEO of the Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health.

Currently, the ASPPH lists 51 accredited schools of Public Health and 37 accredited programs of Public Health worldwide with an additional five working toward accreditation.

The re-accreditation process consists of an evaluation request, an internal review with a self-study document and an external review from the CEPH. Upon completion of these steps, there is a report compiled followed by an agency review and accreditation decision.

In 2010, under the guidance of Dean Gary Raskob, Ph.D., the college implemented a continual process of regular review, evaluation, assessment and modification as a way of consistently complying
with all accreditation requirements. Mattachione said this makes the re-accreditation preparation much more efficient.

“Because of our recurring plan, we will be able to provide five years of well-documented activities and actions that show our efforts in complying with all of the requirements for re-accreditation,” Mattachione said.

The re-accreditation process reviews the governance of the college, faculty quality, utilization of resources and curriculum. Within the curriculum review, re-accreditation evaluates discipline-specific competencies for the five core areas of study, as well as interdisciplinary competencies.

“Our faculty is constantly updating their course syllabus to reflect the competency inclusions,” said Mattachione.

This updating is performed every semester in every course and then reviewed by the college twice a year. Mattachione points out that the OU College of Public Health’s plan of constant self-evaluation goes above and beyond what is required for re-accreditation, and keeps the college a step ahead when it comes to compliance with all re-accreditation requirements.

“This is our way. It is embedded in our process. Constantly striving for education excellence is just part of what we do at the OU College of Public Health,” he said.

The College of Public Health offers professional and graduate degrees in five core areas of public health: biostatistics, epidemiology, health administration and policy, health and promotion sciences, and occupational and environmental health, with additional course work in the areas of public health preparedness and terrorism emergency response.

Accreditation Raises the Bar for Health Departments

The Oklahoma State Department of Health and two local health departments in Oklahoma are among 11 nationwide to attain newly established accreditation status through the Public Health Accreditation Board.

“National accreditation signifies the incredible efforts ongoing in our state to improve and protect the health of the public by advancing the quality of the services provided by our state, local and tribal health departments,” said State Health Commissioner Dr. Terry Cline.

“Our first priority is to ensure the programs and services we provide are as responsive as possible to the needs of the communities we serve. Being among the first to achieve national standards that promote continuous quality improvement demonstrates that we are delivering services as effectively as possible.”

To receive accreditation, a health department must undergo a rigorous, multifaceted, peer-reviewed process to ensure it meets or exceeds a set of quality standards and measures. The Oklahoma State Department of Health and Washington State Department of Health were the only state-level public health agencies recognized in the first group of accredited health departments.

“The Oklahoma State Department of Health is one of the first of many health departments that we look forward to being able to recognize as a high-performing public health department,” said PHAB president and CEO Kaye Bender, Ph.D., R.N., F.A.A.N. when the first accreditation announcements were made in early 2013.

Several local health departments in the state also have earned PHAB accreditation, including the Oklahoma City-County Health Department, Comanche County Health Department and the Tulsa Health Department.

“I am thankful to have a department of outstanding employees with a supportive Board and community partners who helped make this possible. Our seal of accreditation assures Tulsa County residents that our agency puts the community first,” said Tulsa Health Department Director Dr. Bruce Dart.

“The accreditation process helps to ensure that the programs and services we provide are as responsive as possible to the needs of our community,” said Gary Cox, J.D., executive director of the Oklahoma City-County Health Department.

The Public Health Accreditation Board is the independent organization that administers the national accreditation program, which is jointly sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Robert Wood Johnson foundation. The program was created collaboratively over a 10-year period by public health practitioners working at the national, tribal, state and local public health levels.

While public health departments provide expert leadership in protecting and promoting the health of people in communities across the country, there has not been a set of nationally recognized standards until now. Standards cover issues ranging from community health, chronic disease prevention and control, communicable disease prevention and control, injury prevention, health education, health promotion, maternal and child health, public health emergency preparedness, access to clinical services, public health laboratory services, management and administration, and governance.

“We are very pleased that we will be able to post the PHAB seal of accreditation. This visibly demonstrates the work of our dedicated public health professionals who are committed to improving and protecting what matters most – the health of Oklahomans,” Cline said, adding that all of Oklahoma public health departments will be working to achieve accreditation status. “Oklahomans expect their hospitals and schools to be accredited. Now their public health departments will be also,” he said.
tobacco

- Smoking is Oklahoma’s leading cause of preventable death, costing more than 6,000 Oklahoma lives each year.
- Oklahomans spend approximately $1.16 billion per year on smoking-related health costs.
- In 2012, Oklahoma’s adult smoking rate decreased to 23.3 percent, as compared to 26.1 percent in 2011. This improved Oklahoma’s ranking from 47th to 39th in the nation.
- Continued support is needed to help decrease smoking initiation, increase cessation and reduce secondhand smoke.

obesity

- Oklahoma ranks 46th in the nation, with an adult obesity rate of 32.2 percent.
- As an individual’s BMI increases, so do the number of sick days, medical claims and health care costs.
- Efforts to create community, school and business environments that enable individuals to choose healthy options are ongoing in Oklahoma.

children’s health

- Nearly 150 Oklahoma youth were hospitalized with a traumatic brain injury from a sports or recreation activity in 2010.
- In 2012, 4,317 child passengers (infant to age 8) were occupants in a motor vehicle crash; the statewide usage rate for child safety restraints (child safety seats and seat belts) is currently 88 percent.
- Using a cell phone while driving delays a driver’s reactions as much as being legally intoxicated; approximately 800 young drivers (under age 25 in Oklahoma) were involved in crashes while distracted by an electronic device in 2012.
Decades of Service to Students
From the 80s, Through the 90s and Into the New Millenium

The year was 1984. Ronald Reagan was president of the United States. Ghostbusters was the new blockbuster hit; and Augustine Cole was in her first year as a staff member at the OU College of Public Health.

“Of course, I was only 6 then,” Coyle quips.

Almost 30 years later, Coyle is still at the college and still helping students achieve their dreams.

“I enjoy working with students. That’s the best part of my job,” Coyle said. “You meet different students. They often come from different places. They are far away from their families and they tend to come to you for a lot of things.”

As administrative secretary at the college, Coyle is one of the first faces most people see and she also is the person students see often. Coyle said she enjoys being able to help guide students.

When she came to the college, she said the students were generally older than her and they often helped her, sharing good advice. Now, she is older than most of the students at the college and it is Coyle who is the one providing them guidance.

“Now, I am in a role that allows me to give them advice,” she said. “I enjoy helping them. I am on them all the time to keep their grades up. Some may think I am a little bossy at times, but it’s only because I truly care. And I think they really appreciate me when they graduate.”

When she is not working, Coyle enjoys reading, traveling with her husband of 11 years, Jesse, and crafting. In fact, she just took up jewelry making.

Her children and grandchildren, though, are the true gems in her life. Coyle has two grown sons – Marvin, who lives in Cambridge, Mass., and James, who lives in Virginia Beach; a stepdaughter Keyosha and seven grandchildren, who she adores. It’s a big family, but even bigger when you consider the many students Coyle counts as her own.

“It feels really good when you see them graduate. They kind of become like your kids. So you are so proud when you see your students go out and succeed, getting really good jobs. That feels great.”

“I enjoy working with students. That’s the best part of my job.”
A Rising Star
In Public Health
From D.C. to Oklahoma and back again

“I wouldn’t be where I am today without the education I received at the OU College of Public Health.”
Amanda Cash was teaching in The Czech Republic when the World Trade Center collapsed on Sept. 11, 2001. She soon moved back to be with her family in Washington, D.C., and accepted a job as the grant coordinator at the Association of Schools for Public Health.

Each day she read through grant proposals and soon realized she was on the wrong end of the process.

“I kept looking through these grants thinking, ‘I don't want to be a grant coordinator at an association; I want to do what I'm reading about in these applications.' So, I decided I wanted to go back to school,” Cash said.

It was perhaps fortuitous that her job occasionally required her to make site visits to colleges of public health. One of those visits took her to the University of Oklahoma College of Public Health, where she met its dean, Gary Raskob, Ph.D.

“Someone told Dean Raskob that I was considering getting my master of public health, so he approached me with an application and said, ‘I'd like you to think about Oklahoma; there’s a lot we have to offer.’”

Cash did more than think about it. She applied and was accepted to the OU College of Public Health. Soon she was in Oklahoma City, pursuing an advanced degree and studying childhood obesity, specifically how to change children’s eating habits through school nutrition programs.

Cash said the education was tremendous, but it was the mentorship at OU that she valued the most.

“Dean Raskob was an amazing mentor,” she said. “He helped me design my research and helped make sure I was on the right track academically. Dr. Ed Brandt was also an active mentor and guide.”

While at the college, Cash participated in student government, which allowed her to forge friendships with people pursuing a variety of degrees.

“I thought all students could benefit tremendously from understanding how different disciplines are trained, given the fact that most disorders and conditions are multifaceted and difficult to treat,” she said.

After earning her doctor of public health degree at OU, Cash applied for various fellowships. It was a fellowship at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that brought Cash back to Washington, D.C. She worked in the Maternal and Child Health Bureau of the Health Resources and Services Administration, the primary federal agency responsible for improving access to health care services for the uninsured and medically vulnerable.

Following the internship, the bureau hired Cash as part of its planning and evaluation office. Two short years later, she was working on the Secretary of Health and Human Services' healthy weight task force.

Cash started the Healthy Weight Collaborative, and then began working with the HHS assistant secretary for planning and evaluation. Now, she is a part of the team advising the Secretary on health issues, research policy and design studies. She also is involved in the prevention aspects of health care reform.

Cash credits the OU College of Public Health with giving her the skills she has needed to be successful in her career as well as the training required to excel in her current position as a senior health policy analyst.

“OU is focused on public health practice and on how to apply research in real-world settings. Almost everything I did at the OU College of Public Health — attending classes, pedagogic learning, working with state and local health departments and conducting research — enabled me to understand systems and how they work together at the state, local and federal level,” Cash said. “It helped me figure out where I wanted to go and how to get there. It made me a stronger candidate for public health work at the national level, because I understood the public health system well.”

“I wouldn’t be where I am today without the education I received at the OU College of Public Health.”
Just as blood is composed of many parts and has multiple functions, so has been the 50-year career of hematologist James N. George, M.D. He is a researcher, a teacher, a caregiver and above all a mentor to those embarking on a future in public health.

A hematologist by training, George has positively impacted the lives of countless patients, future physicians and public health professionals and the fields of both medicine and public health. George holds the George Lynn Cross Research Professorship in the Departments of Medicine and Biostatistics and Epidemiology at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center. His career has been a remarkable journey in which he has moved seamlessly from clinical care to laboratory research to teaching and administration and finally back to patient-centered research and care.

As a pioneer in the field of platelet glycoproteins, Dr. George and colleagues were able to describe the molecular basis of platelet function in hemostasis, one of his signature research achievements, in the early 1980s.

The cornerstone of George’s current work is his initiation and maintenance of a registry in Oklahoma for a rare blood disorder known by the acronym TTP-HUR. It leads to blood clots in small blood vessels, resulting in an increased risk for damage to the heart, kidneys and brain. George has been personally involved in the care of 92 percent of patients in the registry since 1995, making it one of the most well-conducted and powerful registries to date, and boosting clinical knowledge of this rare disorder.

Recently, George also was honored with the Wallace H. Coulter Award for Lifetime Achievement in Hematology by the American Society of Hematology for his outstanding contributions to the

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Dreamcatcher: Native Hope and Health

“My goal is to really transform the physical and social landscape of the American Indian tribes”
Leonardo da Vinci said, “It had long since come to my attention that people of accomplishment rarely sat back and let things happen to them. They went out and happened to things.”

Da Vinci’s quote could well have been written about OU College of Public Health alumna Valarie Blue Bird Jernigan.

A member of the Choctaw tribe, Jernigan has long felt a passion for American Indians, their culture and their future too. Yet, applying that passion to a career proved challenging at first. “I don’t think I knew what I wanted to be when I began college,” Jernigan said. “I was interested in having the freedom to pursue my own ideas.”

Jernigan found that freedom while pursuing a degree in anthropology at the University of Southern Maine.

Later, when she returned to Oklahoma to care for her mother who had been diagnosed with multiple myeloma, a new desire was ignited for Jernigan – the desire to change public health, especially as it relates to American Indians. “As a child I remember dealing with the Indian Health Care systems,” Jernigan said. “Those experiences planted a seed to advocate for health quality and access for all people, especially Native Americans.”

Jernigan decided to pursue a graduate degree in Public Health at OU. She chose the OU College of Public Health because of its emphasis on health promotion sciences and Native American research. At the college, she quickly fell in love with public health research. “I knew OU was the right place for me,” she said, adding that she found a mentor right away in Dr. Elisa Lee, who is the George Lynn Cross Research Professor of Biostatistics and Epidemiology as well as director of the Center for American Indian Health Research at the college.

“I was different than perhaps most MPH students in that I got intensive research training almost immediately. Dr. Elisa Lee was principal investigator for the Strong Heart Study — the largest longitudinal cohort study of American Indian cardiovascular disease ever conducted within this country. She personally invited me to work on the Strong Heart Study after interviewing me. Dr. Lee was a mentor and someone who really got me on the research track. That helped me to become a researcher while studying as a student, and inspired my interest to go on to pursue a doctorate.”

A month after graduating with her master of public health degree from OU, Jernigan was hired as director of community health at the Indian Health Center at Santa Clara Valley in the San Francisco Bay area.

She quickly noticed the lack of American Indian representation at the public health leadership level. Jernigan had a plan. She wrote and received a grant from the National Institutes of Health to cover the cost of her continued education, earning her doctorate in public health. With her new title, Jernigan accepted a post-doctorate fellowship at Stanford University Prevention Research Center. While there, she also pursued a degree in filmmaking. “My life is focused around improving the health of native people by using arts and activism,” she said. “Being a filmmaker is about bringing tribal voices to the table, voicing the perspectives of Native people and their concerns about access to healthy food and healthy places.”

Jernigan went on to share her love of learning and passion for public health at the University of Washington, University of California Davis and the University of New Mexico before returning to OU.

She and her husband, Tvli Jacob, who also is a filmmaker and fellow Choctaw, decided to move back to the Tulsa area to raise their daughter, Cedar, as a Choctaw.

Jernigan is an assistant professor in Health Promotion Sciences for the OU College of Public Health and focuses much of her work on addressing obesity and on the development of healthy environments through community-based intervention. “I asked to be placed at OU Tulsa, which was made possible by Dean Gary Raskob, who is a very important mentor to me and a huge advocate for my career,” Jernigan said. “The most valuable aspect about training and teaching at OU has been the research experience, the exposure to Native American health disparities and the science behind those health disparities, which helped shape my own work in community-based participatory research, community organizing and community building for health.”

In June 2013, Jernigan received a $3.5 million RO1 grant from the National Institutes of Health to create a healthier food environment for American Indians in Oklahoma. “My goal is to really transform the physical and social landscape of the American Indian tribes,” she said. “I want to see in my lifetime the opportunity for health for American Indians to parallel those who have the resources for healthy environments. Native communities have done amazing work on improving these situations. My work just complements what they envision for their future.”
Erin Davis  
**Edward N. Brandt, Jr. Scholarship**  
A native of Pittsburgh, Pa., Erin graduated with a degree in biology from the University of Pittsburgh before earning a master’s degree in epidemiology at the OUHSC. She currently is a doctoral candidate in the BSE department. Erin’s research interests and dissertation focus are in the field of maternal and child health, concentrating on vitamin D deficiency and associated negative health outcomes.

Amanda Janitz  
**Edward N. Brandt, Jr. Scholarship**  
Amanda is pursuing a doctorate in the field of epidemiology with a focus on childhood cancers. Amanda worked as a pediatric oncology nurse before pursuing her master’s degree in public health in 2007. She also has worked as a research nurse and returned to OU with the goal of completing the doctoral program and contributing to cancer research in Oklahoma.

Cherionique Thomas  
**Calvey Family Scholarship**  
Born in Ada, Okla., Cher graduated high school with honors and earned a bachelor’s degree in international business with a minor in management. After graduating from college, a new desire took hold for Cher – to promote health through education. So while still completing a master’s degree in business administration at the University of Central Oklahoma, she began pursuing a master’s of public health degree at OU.

Oumy Sy  
**Ronald L. Coleman Scholarship**  
Born and raised in Senegal, West Africa, Oumy currently is pursuing a master’s degree in industrial hygiene and environmental health science. She earned her bachelor’s degree in biology and has more than five years of experience working in the public health field of HIV testing and counseling. Oumy is an active member of “Ndimbeule” (a Senegalese organization in Oklahoma City), helping collect clothing and school supplies for underprivileged children in Senegal. Oumy’s goal is to help protect the health and safety of people in the work place and incommunities worldwide.

Breanca Thomas  
**COPH Advisory Board Scholarship**  
Breanca is a doctoral student in health promotion science at the OU College of Public Health. A native of Shreveport, La., she earned a bachelor’s degree in journalism and a master’s degree in political science. She decided to pursue a career in public health because of her interests in health disparities and the growing role of public policy in health behavior. Breanca’s research interests center on social and political determinants of obesity and its comorbidities. She intends to pursue a research career focusing on effective methods to reduce health disparities.

Abigail Lansdown  
**ConocoPhillips OEH Scholarship**  
After receiving a bachelor’s degree in kinesiology and dance, and following a successful career as a dancer in Colorado and Texas, Abbe set her sights on a new goal. She currently is working toward her master’s degree in industrial hygiene and environmental health sciences. After earning her master’s, she plans to also pursue a doctorate in the field. She aspires to work as an industrial hygienist for an oil and gas company, managing health safety and environmental concerns.

Stephanie Villanella  
**ConocoPhillips OEH Scholarship**  
Stephanie is a second-year student from Skiatook, Okla., pursuing a master’s degree in industrial hygiene and environmental health sciences. She earned a bachelor’s degree in biology and now works for the OSBI as a fingerprint technician, while also interning with Marshall Environmental Management Inc. as an industrial hygiene associate. Her master’s thesis focuses on exposure risk posed by toilet flush bio-aerosols. Stephanie looks forward to a career as an industrial hygienist and safety professional.

Molly McCool  
**David J. Falcone, PhD Scholarship**  
Molly is a master’s of health administration candidate from Eufaula, Okla. After graduating with a bachelor’s degree in multidisciplinary studies with an emphasis in health studies, she realized that health care administration was her calling. Molly gained hands-on learning experience in hospital administration with a summer internship at Integris Bass Baptist Health Center in Enid, Okla. She plans to pursue a post-graduate fellowship and looks forward to a career in hospital administration, specifically in physician practice management.
Jannate Ahmed
*Rosetta Fisher Scholarship (through COPH Alumni Association)*

Jannate, who graduated with an undergraduate degree in medicine from Bangladesh, currently is in her second year of the Master’s of Public Health Program. Her experience and observations led her to realize that future health management will require a serious investment in preventive medicine, and that motivated her to prepare for a career in epidemiology. Jannate is a graduate research assistant on the Surveillance of Deep Vein Thrombosis and Pulmonary Embolism project and is completing her practicum with the State Department Health. She looks forward to a career in chronic disease research and clinical epidemiology.

Ann Paul
*Rosetta Fisher Scholarship (through COPH Alumni Association)*

With 30 years of experience in health care management and administration, Ann is back in school. She recently completed the MPH program at OU with a 4.0 GPA and recognition as Outstanding Student of the Year, Interdisciplinary Public Health. She now is working on a doctorate in public health with a special focus on improving population health through collaboration throughout the care continuum. As a vice president with St. John Health System in Tulsa, Ann is leading various population health management development initiatives, including accountable care organization development.

Jessica Reese
*James George Scholarship*

Jessica currently is pursuing a doctorate in epidemiology. She earned a bachelor’s in zoology-biomedical sciences from OU and a master’s degree in epidemiology. Jessica currently works as a clinical trials coordinator under the direction of Dr. Jim George and has gained experience in clinical research, presenting research at national conferences and publishing papers on a variety of hematology-related disorders. She looks forward to continuing her career in hematology.

Hanh Dung Dao
*CMDR Edmund Gleason Scholarship*

Hanh (June to those who know her) is working toward a master’s degree in epidemiology with specific interest in environmental exposure and cancer risk. Born and raised in Vietnam before moving to the United States in 2008, she was valedictorian of her graduating class at Northern Arizona University, earning a bachelor’s degree in biology and chemistry. Hanh has worked as a graduate assistant in the BSE department for a couple of years, now with involvement in a number of projects, including a study involving diabetes in minority pregnancy. She also is exploring the association between residency near oil refinery plants in Oklahoma and cancer.

Nam Do
*Brent Hurd Scholarship*

Nam is in his second year of study as a master of health administration candidate. While earning a bachelor’s degree in zoology, his interest shifted to health administration, a field that combines his love of health care with his strengths in leadership. Nam completed an internship at the JPS Health Network in Texas, an experience that exposed him to the inner-workings of a hospital. He hopes to further explore his interests in health care operations, finance and quality improvement as it relates to the patient experience as he enters a career in the health care industry.

Hannah Hirsch
*Robert W. Ketner Scholarship*

Hannah was born and raised in Oklahoma City, She earned a bachelor’s degree in environmental studies form OU. In her junior year of college, she decided a graduate degree in public health could provide her the skills required to achieve her goal of improving the health, wellbeing and lives of others. While working toward her master’s of public health degree in epidemiology, Hannah has worked as an epidemiology intern at the State Department of Health. Upon graduation, she plans to build a career focused on creating a healthier future for all.

Sydney Martinez
*Elisa T. Lee Scholarship*

A second-year doctoral student studying epidemiology, Sydney’s current research focuses on cancer disparities among American Indians in Oklahoma. By better understanding health disparities among American Indians and populations with low socioeconomic status, she hopes to develop strategies to reduce those disparities, especially as they relate to tobacco use. Sydney previously worked as an epidemiologist at the Oklahoma City Area Inter-Tribal Health Board. She currently works as a research project coordinator at OU, evaluating public health prevention programs involving tobacco, physical activity and nutrition.

Bradley Bishop
*Dan J. Macer Scholarship*

Brad is a masters of health administration candidate from Bristow, Okla. His passion for health administration grew out of his experiences as his mother battled cancer. Currently employed in a marketing role at Integris Health. Brad leads the Integris video team, has won national marketing awards, and has been a guest speaker at the National Healthcare Internet Marketing Awards. Upon graduation, he intends to begin a postgraduate fellowship as he continues to work toward his goal of becoming a member of the executive leadership team for a children’s hospital.

Evaren Page
*Dan J. Macer Scholarship*

Evaren is in her second year of the masters of public health program at OU with a concentration in epidemiology. Her key interests center on infectious disease etiology, transmission dynamics and surveillance methods. She has participated in OU Leadership, worked as a research technician for the Transition Project with the Harold Hamm Diabetes Center at OU and participated in the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration summer internship program in Rockville, Md., gaining valuable experience working with data at the federal level. After completing the MPH program, Evaren plans to pursue a doctoral degree.

Ram Poudel
*Dan J. Macer Scholarship*

A graduate research assistant for Sooner SUCCESS, Ram is pursuing a masters of public health in epidemiology. He has eight years of experience in natural and holistic health approaches from his work in Nepal, India, Malaysia and Singapore. With a love of serving others, Ram volunteers for the Oklahoma Medical Reserve Corps, the Oklahoma City-County Health Department’s Total Wellness Program and is active in a variety of statewide and campus organizations. He prefers working with big data and infectious disease modeling, but spatial analysis is his passion.

**Give the Gift of Education**

If you are interested in making a donation to the college in support of one of these named scholarships, or would like information on establishing a new named scholarship, please contact Deanna Debus at (405) 271-2232 or Deanna-Debus@ouhsc.edu.
OU College of Public Health Dean Gary Raskob has been selected to chair the National Blood Clot Alliance's Medical and Scientific Advisory Board.

“The Alliance is fortunate to have this nationally respected research scientist and public health leader at the helm of our Medical and Scientific Advisory Board. He has leadership experience chairing medical and advocacy bodies and will bring great energy and ideas to the work of our advisory body,” said NBCA President Joe Isaacs.

A national and international authority in thrombosis, much of Raskob's work includes clinical trials directed at the prevention and treatment of deep vein thrombosis and pulmonary embolism.

“It is my goal to focus on working with Alliance leadership to substantially reduce the number of deaths due to blood clots in America. We have the knowledge and technology. The key to success will be prevention through increased awareness and application among patients, health professionals and the public,” Raskob said.

Raskob also is chair-elect of the Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health, a national organization of schools and programs accredited by the Council on Education for Public Health.
Christina Bennett, J.D.
Assistant Professor, Health Administration and Policy
Bennett’s research interests include the Affordable Care Act and conflict resolution. She will be teaching Professional Communication Skills in Healthcare Settings, Public Health Law and Human Resource Management. Bennett practiced criminal appellate and bankruptcy law, but when her mother was diagnosed and died from cancer, she shifted her focus to health care policy. Author of the book TennCare: A State’s Experiment with Medicaid Expansion, Bennett’s future plans include working with policy makers for Oklahoma’s Medicaid program and conducting stakeholder policy analysis.

Ann Chou, Ph.D.
Associate Professor, Health Administration and Policy
Chou returns to the college after serving as researcher with the Veterans Affairs Health Services Research & Development Center of Excellence for the Study of Healthcare Provider Behavior in Los Angeles. She also has worked for the National Committee for Quality Assurance in Washington, D.C., and has held numerous teaching and research positions since graduating with her doctorate in health services and policy analysis from the University of California Berkeley. Chou is actively engaged in several funded research projects and is widely published in peer reviewed journals.

Evan Floyd, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor, Occupational and Environmental Health
Floyd’s years of industry experience and undergraduate background in chemistry helped him identify and complete his dissertation research. He used carbon nanotubes to bridge the sensitivity gap of two widely used methods in VOC exposure analysis, thereby developing a new technique to improve analytical sensitivity, increase throughput and reduce time-to-knowledge for field hygienists. Floyd says he gets a true sense of accomplishment knowing that his work will help protect workers and make a difference in lives. In addition to his work with carbonaceous nanomaterials, he has an interest in aerosol science and noise-induced hearing loss. Interestingly, one of Floyd’s hobbies is alternative energy.

Shari Kinney, Dr.Ph.
Assistant Professor, Health Administration and Policy
Kinney has more than 25 years of experience in public health practice, including work in newborn metabolic screening, genetics and maternal and child health. She spent the last nine and a half years as the administrator for the Cleveland and McClain County health departments. Her interests include practice-based research, public health accreditation, performance standards, public health leadership, community assessment and community health improvement plans.

Jun Wang, Ph.D.
Assistant professor, Occupational and Environmental Health
Wang received his bachelor of science degree in environmental engineering and his master of science degree in environmental management and economics from Nankai University in China. Prior to coming to the United States, Wang’s research primarily focused on characterization of ambient air pollution in China. He obtained his doctorate in environmental engineering sciences from the University of Florida, working on several projects related to air quality. Wang is the author of more than 10 peer-reviewed papers and two books. He has won prestigious fellowships and awards from various professional associations. His future research at OU will focus on identifying the airborne pollutants exposure in the ambient and occupational environment, studying biotoxicity of aerosols and nanoparticles, and developing air pollution and exposure control technology.
The Northeast Regional Health and Wellness Campus will impact the health of Oklahoma City and County and improve the lives of local residents. Community partners, including OU Physicians, Northcare, and several others, have committed their support to the Wellness Campus. Each partner will offer services and resources utilizing the Wellness Campus as a satellite location.

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