

DEPARTMENT OF Medicine, Health, and Society



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FROM THE CHAIR OF MHS



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“The greatness of a community is most accurately measured by the compassionate actions of its members,” Coretta Scott King once said. So has it been for the community of MHS. Through a time of unprecedented challenge, our remarkable students, staff, and faculty have risen to the task. When the pandemic hit, students rallied to form outreach networks, and began important projects that aimed to better understand the moment and assist those most at risk. Over the past two years those networks proved invaluable. Faculty and staff worked heroically to teach, learn, and grow through the challenges posed by various COVID waves and variants, while at the same time producing state-of-the-art research at the nexus of medicine, health, and society.

MHS has thus emerged as a vibrant hub in Vanderbilt’s response to the urgency of the moment. Our students and faculty have been at the fore of a number of vital efforts: addressing the structural drivers of racial inequities in COVID mortality rates, advising the Nashville city government about communal safety practices, creating innovative new formats for online teaching, analyzing the healthcare of tomorrow, and researching the pandemic through lenses of history, literature, sociology, disability, gender, geography, and economy. These and other efforts have been guided by our overarching ideals of health social and structural justice, which course through our many efforts to cumulatively and creatively address the grand challenges relating to health, healthcare, and healthcare solutions in the U.S. and the world. Along the way, our community has over-and-over again proved the adage that, if you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.

This is the eighth edition of the Vanderbilt Department of Medicine, Health, and Society (MHS) newsletter. I particularly wish to thank Tara McKay, Ken MacLeish, Odie Lindsey, and Dana DeLoca for their tremendous efforts in crafting and editing the content that appears within these pages.

MHS continues to flourish, even during a pandemic moment. The department continues to produce world-class research, teaching, and immersion. We boast a growing cohort of top-of-the-field scholars, and expanding, innovative undergraduate and graduate curricula. We offer over 70 MHS courses, and support over 750 [undergraduate majors](#) and a smaller number of minors. Over 200 students graduate with an MHS major each year. Success stories abound. As but one example, in 2019, a remarkable 83% of MHS students who applied to medical school were accepted—more than double the national average. Our undergraduate curriculum offers seven important concentration areas, driven

by student interest and faculty expertise in areas such as global health, health policies and economics, health justice, and medicine, humanities, and the arts. We also support a vibrant and growing master’s degree program—the MA in [Social Foundations of Health](#). MA students, too, are going on to exciting and diverse careers in a variety of fields. We also collaborate with several other departments to support PhD students.

[MHS](#) functions as a hub for pioneering research and first-rate teaching that focuses on the many, diverse aspects of healthcare solutions. Our robust cohort of core faculty spans a continuum of expertise including mental health, global health, health policy and health economics, health demography, research ethics, military mental health, men’s health and racial disparities, gender and disability studies, literature and medicine, and pre-med curricular innovation, to name but a few!

As this newsletter details, over the past year our faculty published important articles and books, won major grants and awards, appeared on a host of national media outlets. With the added expertise of more than 90 jointly-appointed and affiliated faculty members, the center is truly a trans-institutional cog bridging Vanderbilt’s many intellectual strengths.

We also continue to publish scholarly articles that detail the impact of our curriculum. For instance, [a major study](#) in *Social Science and Medicine* detailed the effectiveness of our “new approach to teaching [race and health](#).” This is but the latest testament to the ways that MHS students learn to think critically about complex social issues that impact health, health care, and health policy—skills which are particularly vital in the current pandemic crisis. By teaching students to grapple with these monumental questions, the department is helping develop sophisticated thinkers who are trained to be unsatisfied with the status quo—a generation of students who are prepared to find new solutions out of a complex web of challenges that we will face in the post-pandemic era. The future feels in many ways uncertain, but I feel great confidence knowing that students like ours will become the leaders of tomorrow and show us all the way forward.

These and other initiatives are continually updated on our website, www.vanderbilt.edu/mhs, and our doors are always open to students, parents, scholars, community members, and all others. We hope that you will visit often and stay tuned as we grow.

Wishing safety for our community,

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FULBRIGHT AWARDS

Congratulations to Medicine, Health, and Society Class of 2020 students Mary Hanna and Adrienne Parks for receiving Fulbright awards in the 2020–21 cycle. Both Mary and Adrienne were awarded English Teaching Assistantships in Spain.

TA AWARD FOR PATRICK ANTHONY

Congratulations to Patrick Anthony, a PhD candidate in the Department of History, for winning the 2020 Outstanding Graduate Teaching Assistant Award for his TA work under MHS professor Dr. Laura Stark. The award recognizes excellence in teaching assistance and is granted to graduate students who lead a class section, or share instruction with a class. Anthony's commitment to pedagogy and exceptional care for students are notable as he was one of only three teaching assistants to win this award. He has been celebrated by Medicine, Health, and Society students as a politically-sensitive, open-minded, humble, and inclusive instructor, and MHS is glad to have had his care and expertise in the department.

BOOK AWARD FOR PROFESSOR POPE

Assistant Professor of Practice Jamie Pope won the 2020 Textbook Excellence Award for her textbook, *Nutrition for a Changing World* (2nd ed.), from the Textbook and Academic Authors Association. Dr. Pope's textbook is currently in use in over 140 universities across the country. In addition, Dr. Pope won the 2021 Outstanding Dietetics Educator Award from the Nashville Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.

NIH DIVERSITY SUPPLEMENT AWARD FOR HARRY BARBEE

Harry Barbee joined Medicine, Health, and Society in August 2020 as a postdoctoral researcher after being awarded a Diversity Supplement Award from the National Institutes of Health. This award allowed Harry to join Dr. Tara McKay's R01 grant project, the Vanderbilt University Social Networks, Aging, and Policy Study (VUSNAPS). As a postdoc, Harry's research has investigated how gender and sexuality affect people's subjective experiences and perceptions of aging—often called “subjective aging”—which includes, for example, worries about the future, perceptions of aging bodies, views on age stereotypes, and timing of life course stages (e.g., midlife).

AWARD-WINNING ADVISING

Congratulations to Professor Celina Callahan-Kapoor for receiving the College of Arts & Science's Faculty Adviser Award in Social Sciences. The award recognizes Professor Callahan-Kapoor's excellence in advising undergraduates, who praise her insight, care, and commitment to helping students realize their goals.

PROFESSOR HAMRAIE TAPPED FOR PRESIDENTIAL BOARD

Professor Aimi Hamraie was appointed by President Joe Biden to join the White House's Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Access Board. A scholar of disability and design, Professor Hamraie will help develop federal accessibility standards that promote equitable access for people with disabilities.

DEPARTMENT OF MEDICINE, HEALTH, AND SOCIETY EXPANDS COLLABORATIVE POTENTIAL WITH NEW HIRES

By Kathryn Royster, [A&S Communications Team](#)



In 2007, Vanderbilt's College of Arts and Science launched an innovative new major: [Medicine, Health, and Society \(MHS\)](#). From attracting just 40 enrollees in its first year, the interdisciplinary program has grown rapidly into one of A&S's most popular majors. More than 700 undergraduate students are now studying toward an MHS degree, and MHS has also added a vibrant MA program in the Social Foundations of Health. In July 2020, MHS became [a full-fledged department](#), and it has gained international acclaim for its [creative approaches](#) to teaching health leaders of tomorrow about social and racial justice and health. Following the recent hire of a group of junior faculty who will start in Fall 2021, MHS is now poised for a new phase of collaborative growth. MHS is pleased to welcome Kirsty Clark, assistant professor of MHS and Public Policy, Lucie Kalousová, assistant professor of MHS and Sociology, and Katherine Wen, assistant professor of MHS and Public Policy.

"These hires represent the next step toward building a truly vibrant, truly interdisciplinary health studies program," said [Dr. Jonathan Metzl](#), MHS department chair and Frederick B. Rentschler II Professor of Sociology and Medicine, Health, and Society. "Our aim all along has not been to hire people based on discipline, but to build teams of collaborators who work together across disciplines, to better understand and address the pressing medical issues of our day, from multiple interlinked points of view." Dr. Metzl, who holds an MD/PhD, is also a professor of psychiatry and health policy with Vanderbilt University Medical Center. "We're showing a new model of what you might call critical health studies, which is different disciplines working together to address urgent social, political, and economic and health issues facing society."

MHS's new faculty are quantitative social scientists who specialize in a range of issues, including vaccines, gun policy, LGBT health, and immigration. Though early in their careers, they already have strong records of interdisciplinary collaboration—exactly the kind of work at which MHS excels. Their expertise, Metzl said, will reinforce the department's reputation as a national leader in training pre-health students.

"MHS exists to help society and students understand the implications of urgent issues like the pandemic or our national reckoning with the health effects of inequity. We're increasing the depth and the breadth at which we can have those conversations in our department. As a result, we can better train students to go out in the world and address these urgent questions," Metzl said.

Pictured top to bottom: Kirsty Clark (Assistant Professor of MHS and Public Policy), Lucie Kalousová (Assistant Professor of MHS and Sociology) and Katherine Wen (Assistant Professor of MHS and Public Policy).

MHS WRITER-IN-RESIDENCE WINS AWARD FOR LATEST NOVEL



MHS writer-in-residence Odie Lindsey won the Award for Fiction from the Mississippi Institute of Arts and Letters for his novel, *Some Go Home*. The prize, awarded in disciplines such as visual arts, poetry, and music composition, is the state's highest designation for creative works.

In [*Some Go Home* \(W.W. Norton\)](#), a female veteran from a small Mississippi town comes to realize that the culture of her homeplace, in particular her community's link to a Civil Rights-era murder, is as traumatizing and complex as was her combat experience.

The novel's subject matter relates to much of Lindsey's MHS coursework. Its storylines examine the impact of gender, class, and race, as accentuated by the militarized and memorialized South, and its ongoing relationship to violence. Additional influences on the novel include Lindsey's work as associate editor on the [*Mississippi Encyclopedia* \(University Press of Mississippi, 2017\)](#), and his own combat deployment. The protagonist in *Some Go Home* first appeared in Professor Lindsey's 2016 short story collection, *We Come to Our Senses* (W.W. Norton).

In addition to the MIAL prize, Professor Lindsey was also awarded the 2021 Dobie Paisano fellowship from the Texas Institute of Letters and the Graduate School at the University of Texas, and he received the 2021 McGinnis-Ritchie Award for Nonfiction from the *Southwest Review*. His current projects include a new story collection that examines the role of whiteness, pop culture, and identity-making, and a novel that considers Nashville's global entertainment industry and local Kurdish population.

Dr. Ellesse-Roselle Akre was a postdoctoral researcher with the Vanderbilt University [Social Networks, Aging, and Policy Study \(VUSNAPS\)](#) from 2020 to 2021. During this period, she worked closely with mentors Dr. Gilbert Gonzales, Dr. Tara McKay, and Dr. Christopher Carpenter to innovate vital research in the field of LGBTQ+ health. In July 2021, she joined the Department of Health Policy at the Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth College, where she is now part of a new cohort of health equity researchers. Congratulations, Dr. Akre!

Before joining the VUSNAPS team, Dr. Akre graduated from the University of Maryland School of Public Health with a PhD in Health Services Research. Dr. Akre's research explores barriers to health care access and utilization for vulnerable populations. Focusing on the experience of LGBTQ+ folks, Dr. Akre investigates questions related to health care discrimination, LGBTQ+-affirming care, and medical mistrust. Her research is grounded in the intersectionality theoretical framework, and considers how unique combinations of social identities can create opportunities for discrimination. Having recognized that much of the existing, population-based literature on LGBTQ+ health excludes transgender, lesbian and bisexual women, and POC, Dr. Akre seeks to examine the "heterogeneity within the LGBTQ+ community." Dr. Akre has recently given invited talks at Brown University and Dartmouth College, has recent publications in *LGBT Health*, and was the featured author for the Twitter-based, national LGBTQ Health Journal club.

EXPLORING BARRIERS TO HEALTH CARE ACCESS AND UTILIZATION FOR VULNERABLE POPULATIONS



MYERS AWARDED EMERITUS STATUS



In March 2022, MHS faculty member Hector Myers, who is retiring in Spring 2022, was awarded the title of Emeritus Professor by the College of Arts and Science. Professor Myers received his PhD in Clinical Psychology from UCLA and then spent more than 30 years as Professor of Clinical and Health Psychology and six years as Director of Clinical Training at UCLA. He came to MHS nearly a decade ago and became one of the department's top scholars and most sought-after teachers and mentors.

Professor Myers has [published extensively](#) on biobehavioral and psychosocial factors contributing to racial/ethnic disparities in physical and mental health, with specific focus of African American, Hispanic, and Asian populations. His key research contributions include the first neurobehavioral sequelae of HIV/AIDS in African American men; one of the largest multi-site longitudinal studies of HIV-positive women and their partners; clinical trials of risk reduction intervention for women with histories of childhood sexual abuse; and a community-based cancer risk reduction intervention for obesity in African American men with colleagues at the Center for Men's Health in MHS.

Professor Myers has received numerous awards for teaching and mentoring over the course of his career, including the UCLA Luckman Distinguished Teaching Award and the Samuel M. Turner Mentoring Award from the American Psychological Association, and he has developed of programs to recruit and retain minority graduate students.

At Vanderbilt, Professor Myers developed and taught seven new undergraduate and graduate courses, with a focus on health disparities and interventions to address them. He is a vital member of the department leadership team and a beloved part of the MHS community. MHS Chair Dr. Jonathan Metzl described Professor Myers as “the type of person who shows up, reliably and consistently, for others.” MHS students, staff, and faculty note Professor Myers' warmth, collegiality, and penetrating insight, and look forward to working with him in his new role.

KALOUSOVÁ EXPLORES INEQUALITY, EMPLOYMENT, AND COGNITIVE HEALTH

Dr. Lucie Kalousová has settled into the department and started teaching Social Dimensions of Health and Society and Medicine courses. She has continued her research on employment, inequality, and smoking and was happy to see a couple of her articles come out in the [Journal of Health and Social Behavior](#) and [Social Science and Medicine](#). Since coming to Vanderbilt, Dr. Kalousová has taken up a new research direction exploring the disparities in cognitive health in later life. The Alzheimer's Association has already funded her preliminary work in this area, and she plans to develop her new research agenda further over the summer.





WELCOME PROFESSOR PANKA BENCSIK!

Professor [Panka Bencsik](#) is joining MHS as an assistant professor in Fall 2022. She is currently a postdoctoral research fellow at the University of Chicago Crime Lab and received her PhD in Economics from the University of Sussex (Brighton, U.K.). In her research, Dr. Bencsik studies the impact of the US criminal justice system, including repeat offenders of gun violence, the intersection of policing and the opioid crisis, as well as the consequences of changes in the public perception of police as a result of excessive uses of force. Importantly, her work prioritizes meaningful engagement with not-for-profit organizations and public agencies like the Mayor's Office of Chicago, the Chicago Police Department, and the Illinois Department of Public Health. In 2022, Dr. Bencsik will be teaching MHS and PPS courses on mental health policy and quantitative methods.

SONG WINS BEST PUBLICATION AWARD

Professor Lijun Song continues her innovative research on social networks and health inequalities, and is happily building a lab, SNAIL (the Social Networks and Inequalities Lab). One of her recent articles, published in [Social Psychology Quarterly](#) in 2020, won the 2021 Best Publication Award from the American Sociological Association's section on the Sociology of Mental Health. The article theorizes the double-edged role of status in social networks for life satisfaction, and it proposes two competing cultural explanations—collectivistic advantage and collectivistic disadvantage—to predict the variation of that role across three settings: the United States, urban China, and Taiwan.

In 2021, Professor Song also published an article with two graduate students (Philip J. Pettis and Yvonne Chen) and one postdoctoral fellow (Marva Goodson-Miller) in the [Journal of Health and Social Behavior](#). This article proposes an overdue new model, the social cost model, to explain the adverse health effects of social relationships and social networks. This article was supported by the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange.



DR. JONATHAN METZL WINS AWARD FOR CAREER CONTRIBUTIONS TO PSYCHIATRY

By Adrienne Burns, [Vanderbilt News](#)

Dr. Jonathan Metzl, the Frederick B. Rentschler II Professor of Sociology and director of the Department of Medicine, Health, and Society (MHS), was named the recipient of the 2020 American Psychiatric Association's Benjamin Rush Award. The award recognizes an individual who has made significant contributions to the literature on the history of psychiatry. In particular, the Association cited Metzl's contributions to understanding how stigmas against mental illness intersect with cultural biases about race and socioeconomic status, as well as his pathbreaking work understanding American gun violence. In addition to his positions in the College of Arts and Science, Metzl is a professor of Psychiatry at Vanderbilt's School of Medicine.

Metzl's work often stands out due to his unique interdisciplinary background in medicine, the humanities, and social sciences. Dr. Philip R. Muskin, a professor of psychiatry at the Columbia University Irving Medical Center, sat on the APA board that nominated Metzl. He said the characteristics of Metzl's work provide important context to mental illness: "Without history we can only repeat the mistakes of the past. It is only via the work of people such as Dr. Metzl that we can remain alert and informed, given the many forces outside of the clinical environment that control access to care for those with mental illness."

As part of his award, Metzl presented a lecture entitled "Mental Illness, Mass Shootings, and the Politics of American Firearms," pulling from his research on gun violence. Metzl's expansive research explores topics ranging from racism to politics and economics. A 2008 Guggenheim fellow, Metzl has written extensively for medical, psychiatric, and popular publications, along with publishing four of his own books.

While immensely honored by the award, Metzl said he is equally grateful for the recognition it provides to his field and to others doing similar work. When Metzl began his career, scholars rarely combined expertise in the clinical side of psychiatry with an understanding of its historical and social aspects. He credits the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Clinical Scholars program with enabling him to earn a PhD in cultural history while he completed his medical fellowship. Metzl remembers that the early years of his career included a relatively small number of people who had MDs and PhDs.

"People were divided. Either you were a doctor, or you were a historian. It's been great to see over the course of the past decade or so that there has been a growth in people, not just working on these topics, but also joining the discipline," Metzl said.

The topics of Metzl's books indicate the broad range of subjects he has studied during his career. Metzl's first major project was *Prozac on the Couch*, a deep dive into pharmaceuticals and the role that psychiatric drugs play in American society. An excerpt from the book notes that "[i]n the realm of the normal are these circumscribed categories illness and health, man and woman, biology and psychoanalysis, and other modes of expression that presuppose the stability of unstable categories." These words

hint at the kind of sustained and critical analysis Metzl would apply to the culture around psychiatric drugs—and every other topic that crossed his path during his career.

He went on to write *The Protest Psychosis: How Schizophrenia Became a Black Disease* in 2010, leading an important dialogue about how schizophrenia and race became intertwined, resulting in African American men being over-diagnosed with the disorder.

His latest book, [Dying of Whiteness: How the Politics of Racial Resentment is Killing America's Heartland](#) has taken him across the airwaves, from [Real Time with Bill Maher](#) to [C-SPAN](#), and into print publications like the [New York Times](#). Metzl summarizes this latest book as a look at white America and gun suicide, and why we blame mental illness for gun violence.

"This narrative of 'guns are a mental illness problem'—which is what we hear—is something that plays into stereotypes about race and about people with mental illness being ticking time bombs," Metzl said. "Part of the work I do is recognizing that this is a very stigmatizing representation, and it gets us farther away from talking about many of the deeper issues with guns."

The relationship between mental illness and gun violence ties deeply into Metzl's work in the College of Arts and Science's Department of Medicine, Health, and Society. The department's research and pedagogical focus is rooted in an interdisciplinary understanding of illness and the varying factors that surround and affect it. In Metzl's opinion, the ability to see the social context around illness is an especially useful skill set right now. He believes that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, people with this kind of dual training can serve as important cultural spokespeople for explaining the larger context of what's happening.

"You can't just understand illness as a biological entity—and we're learning so deeply that illness is political, it is economic, and it is historical. Hopefully the kind of work that I do, and the work that we do at MHS, is showing its urgency at this particular moment" he said.

Metzl wants to help people understand—and overcome—the obstacles that make it harder to talk about hot-button issues across political and social divides. He wants his body of work to open up pathways for people to talk constructively about difficult issues. As someone who has made a career out of joining psychiatry with the studies of race, gender, and society, Metzl has wrestled with many divisive issues. But he doesn't shy away from hard subjects.

"Part of the lesson for me has been that it's what we *should* be doing—taking on the hard topics," he said. "I feel like joining these two careers together has given me the methods and the community and the support to address, in a respectful way, some of the hardest challenges facing the United States."

MHS MAJORS ASSOCIATION RESPONDS TO COVID-19

By Anivarya Kumar, Founder and President

Over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, the MHS Majors Association played an important role in serving medically-vulnerable populations, advancing newfound implications in healthcare, and fostering campus relations on a virtual platform. This past year, the organization initiated a “Letters of Love” service project that attended to elderly patients in nursing homes affected by isolation, and organized a series of virtual volunteering opportunities for Vanderbilt students to safely provide healthcare service to local and global communities.

Additionally, the MHS Executive Board enjoyed hosting monthly guest speaker events about the pandemic’s impact on health and society, including topics such as “Healthcare Under the Biden Administration,” “COVID Vaccine Distribution,” and “Eating Disorder Awareness.” Olivia Ben-Levy, MHS first-year representative, says, “The guest speaker events were very insightful, specifically

when the campus dietician was brought in as our guest speaker. It was super helpful to learn more about disordered eating on college campuses and tell my friends how to notice its signs and symptoms.”

Since its start, MHS Majors Association has grown to over 200 members. According to Lily Jaremski, MHS events manager, “It’s been exciting to see MHS Majors grow over the past year, both in the number of people and in the diversity of interests we attract. Serving as a mentor has helped me grow personally and connect with other MHS majors in different stages of their college journey.” The organization is thankful to its advisor, Dr. Courtney Peterson, and the community of Vanderbilt students who inspired it. As in-person opportunities start to reopen, MHS Majors members are excited to see what the future of MHS Majors Association holds.



Pictured: First Row: Anika Park, Anivarya Kumar, and Olivia Ben-Levy. Second Row: Lily Jaremski, Carson Ferrara, and Jessica Klein. Third Row: Ashley Mullen and Sydney Garretson.



MHS ESTABLISHES SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE

In August 2020, MHS created the Social Justice Committee to prioritize accountability and creativity in anti-oppressive practices. In November 2020, the committee hosted a workshop on the Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture. The committee is supporting ongoing projects to build commitments to Indigenous sovereignty, dismantle anti-Black racism, and support intersectional forms of flourishing.

DIVERSITY WITHOUT INCLUSION: VANDERBILT NEEDS ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES

By Iris Kim



Above: Iris Kim. At left: collage by Iris Kim (Photos from Unsplash, and courtesy of the Asian American Christian Collaborative).

In March 2021, President Joe Biden denounced the thousands of racist assaults Asian Americans have faced throughout the pandemic. Two days later, my friend texted me: he was walking to Commons when a car screeched to a halt next to him. “Hey, Asian sh**!” the driver screamed, then zoomed away. Often overlooked, anti-Asian racism has been ongoing since the start of the pandemic. In the midst of these attacks, Vanderbilt’s silence is deafening. After four years here, I can say that Asian American community has been overlooked by university administration and students alike. There is a lack of awareness surrounding the topic of pandemic racism because there is no public discussion on how the Asian American figure has been formed by the U.S. history of racialization and empire. This deficiency is not because Vanderbilt lacks Asian American students. It is time for Vanderbilt to step up and support its many Asian American students, just as most top universities and colleges have done for years. Watery ramen in our dining halls is not enough. We need tangible resources, education, and support to foster true inclusion and belonging. To my Asian and Asian American friends, family, and allies: now more than ever, we need to learn our own stories. It’s only when we recognize our place and ties to Asians in American history that we can be empowered to stand for justice in this current moment—not only for our own communities, but for all people of color. I am only weeks away from graduating. Part of me was tempted to stay silent and walk away—to just walk across the stage, elbow-bump [Chancellor] Diermeier, and forget about the four years I spent feeling like I did not belong. But after witnessing the injustices of the past year, and hearing my friends wrestle with the same questions about their identity, I cannot sit back and pretend that time will heal all wounds.

Students On The Move

ISAAC STOVALL

HEALTH DISPARITIES AND HEALTH INEQUITIES



May 2021 graduate Isaac Stoval, double-majored in Medicine, Health, and Society, and Sociology. Along with a concentration in Health Behaviors and Health Sciences, his undergraduate experiences included a study abroad program in Morocco, where he conducted research on the unique challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic has presented for refugees and asylum seekers. Furthermore, Stovall serves as a Public Health Emergency Preparedness intern with the Metropolitan Public Health Department of Nashville/Davidson County, a position that entails contact investigations and other responsibilities, such as drafting a COVID-19 Health Equity report. His interests in public and global health stem from his coursework in MHS, and he cites courses by Dr. Jonathan Metzl and Dr. Tara McKay as being formative. After graduating, Stovall began to pursue a master of public health (MPH) degree, with a focus on health policy and law, as through his coursework he has developed an interest in the structural factors that influence health outcomes. While assessing both the social and biological determinants of health, he aims to analyze and address the way that various social, healthcare, and economic policies perpetuate racial and ethnic health disparities, with a particular emphasis on chronic diseases. With the skills and knowledge he gained from his time in the MHS department, Stovall hopes to help reduce the incidence of chronic diseases through policy analysis and public health initiatives and interventions.

LILY JAREMSKI MHS MAJOR WITH SOCIOLOGY AND THEATRE MINORS



Coming to Vanderbilt with passions for both public health and theatre, Lily Jaremski was happy to find that majoring in Medicine, Health, and Society gave her the flexibility to pursue both areas of interest, even adding a minor in Theatre Production. In addition to working as a research assistant on the VUSNAPS project, and serving as a teaching assistant, Lily has worked in professional and student films, performed in live and virtual productions on campus, and written original plays. Lily found that the skills she gained from her work in the theatre, such as communication, creativity, and empathy, translate directly to her other academic interests. As events manager for the MHS Majors Association, Lily frequently coordinates with professors and industry professionals to put on events for MHS students, and moderates panel discussions. Being comfortable in front of an audience came in handy when presenting a paper on campus accessibility at the Undergraduate Writing Symposium, and when she guest-lectured a class as a teaching assistant for Politics of Health. Lily is currently enrolled in the MHS BA/MA 4+1 program; after graduation, she plans to continue creating and working to combat health inequities.

Hannah Nesson is a junior majoring in MHS and minoring in Political Science. A Fall 2020 internship with the Small Planet Institute intersected with both fields of study. A nonprofit organization based in Cambridge, Mass., Small Planet Institute promotes a message of “living democracy,” a philosophy that rests on three core goals: wide dispersion of power, transparency in public affairs, and a culture of mutual accountability. The Institute researches and reports on topics including electoral politics, environmental affairs, hunger, agriculture, and health disparities.

At the Institute, Nesson worked diligently during the 2020 election cycle to connect people to safe voting resources and educate them on polling place rights. She also conducted copy-editing and fact-checking for Frances Moore Lappé’s most recent books, *Diet for a Small Planet: 50th Anniversary Edition* and *It’s Not Too Late*.

This immersive experience was an excellent demonstration of how public health work can stretch far beyond the healthcare field. Hannah hopes to continue applying what she learns in her MHS classes to the nonprofit sector throughout her senior year, and after graduation.

HANNAH NESSON: INTERNSHIP WITH SMALL PLANET INSTITUTE



LANA SCHWARTZ EXPEDITING NEW THERAPIES AND EQUITABLE CARE



MHS major Lana Schwartz ('21) is passionate about bringing emerging treatments to patients quickly and equitably. Motivated by the American Medical Association's finding that new medical research takes an average of 17 years to be applied clinically, she works to accelerate communication between health care practitioners and those in research & development, so that patients can receive newly-developed treatments as soon as possible. While exploring this ambition, Lana worked as a freelance writer for doctors, dietitians, and newspapers throughout her time at Vanderbilt. She focused on publicizing new treatment methods to notify patients, practitioners, and the general public. She feels that her double major in Philosophy and MHS gave her the tools to digest scientific research, analyze its biopsychosocial implications for patients, and communicate concisely with targeted audiences. The MHS Honors program allowed her to learn more about her interest in medical communications; Lana completed a thesis project that examined a debate between endocrinologists over proper thyroid disease treatments. Upon graduation, Lana will be bringing her skills to a biopharmaceutical company, to help accelerate the process of bringing company developments to patients, including a focus on bringing new research and therapies to underserved populations. As a professional, she also hopes to continue expediting communication between scientists and practitioners.

During the summer after her sophomore year, Serena Musungu ('23) will return to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to support her home community using the experience she has gained as an MHS major. After taking Global Health Crises with Professor McKay, Musungu understood that the essence of humanitarianism entails a thorough consideration of the needs of the population in question, in order to effectively address them. With that in mind, Serena will focus her Immersion Project on creating a lasting impact in favor of the most disadvantaged population in DRC's current situation: children. More than half of the population of Kinshasa are children, and many live without adult supervision. In an attempt to help, many orphanages have adopted open-door policies. However, the resulting overcrowding has led to unhealthy living conditions. Serena will be partnering with TOSANGANA, a youth-led organization in Kinshasa, to address this issue from a specific angle: hygiene. Starting in June, the project will consist of the rehabilitation of sanitations in orphanages (e.g. bathrooms), which will promote better hygiene and, consequently, healthier behaviors. Hygiene is key in preventing frequent problems faced by poor Congolese communities, namely worms, diarrhea, and cholera. The failure to meet the underlying needs of a population leads to the reoccurrence of the same struggles, creating a constant state of need. By improving sanitations, Serena hopes to make a meaningful and lasting contribution to the health of her community.

SERENA MUSUNGU REACHING BEYOND THE EXPRESSED NEEDS OF A CHALLENGED COMMUNITY





Keaton Song



Ines Debbiche

KEATON SONG & INES DEBBICHE MHS AS TRANSFER STUDENTS

Keaton Song ('22) and Ines Debbiche ('22) began their college careers at the University of Rochester, studying neuroscience in preparation for careers in medicine and biomedical research. However, both sought to obviate the tunnel vision they had developed for science while studying at a primarily STEM-based institution. Ines transferred to Vanderbilt in Fall 2019 and is now a senior, double-majoring in Neuroscience and Communication in Science and Technology. Keaton, also a senior, transferred in Fall 2020 and is double-majoring in Neuroscience and MHS, with a concentration in Health Behaviors and Health Sciences. Their coursework, which includes Global Health Crises with Dr. Tara McKay, and Men's Health Research & Policy with Dr. Derek Griffith, has furthered their interests in exploring health from broader perspectives. MHS has challenged them to integrate numerous disciplines, in order to create a fruitful dialogue around how the world ought to be. For students who frequently find themselves focusing on the fine details about the inner workings of the brain, Ines and Keaton have appreciated the new perspectives that MHS brings on the social influences of global health policies. They have found incredible value in the opportunity to engage in interdisciplinary innovation, and look forward to continuing their studies in MHS.



TREY MINTER RECONTEXTUALIZING AND REIMAGINATION: THE PUBLIC HEALTH PROFESSIONAL AND THE U.S. HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

After a summer working at a public health research internship under the mentorship of several public health professionals, Trey Minter ('22) began to wonder if public health professionals could be poised to help create transformative change within the healthcare system. Combining his interests, research experiences, and coursework around Latin American social medicine, decolonization, racial justice, policy, and mutual aid and solidarity, Minter decided to focus his senior Honors thesis on imagining new ways of creating healthcare systems under the supervision of Professor Domonique Béhague. Minter's research had three aims: (1) use a framework of racial capitalism to contextualize the current U.S. healthcare system to explain health disparities and inequities that exist, (2) learn how public health professionals work in and think about the healthcare system, and (3) use imaginative, alternative research methods. Minter conducted semi-structured interviews with 10 public health professionals of various backgrounds and workplaces. Preliminary data suggest that public health professionals' experiences and foundational skills allow them to push for broad changes to the healthcare system. Furthermore, using imaginative methods and allowing public health professionals the space to imagine changes to the status quo creates the conditions for the most transformative ideas to be put into practice.



JOSEPH SEXTON
THE VANDERBILT CRITICAL
PSYCHIATRY CONFERENCE:
STUDENT-LED EVENT DRAWS
CLINICIANS AND SCHOLARS
FROM AROUND THE GLOBE



BRINA RATANGEE TENNESSEE'S LGBTQ HISTORY... AND THE IMPACT OF LEGISLATIVE ERASURET

MHS major Brina Ratangee's ('25) journey from student in Professor Kirsty Clark's fall 2021 LGBTQ Health Disparities course to published op-ed writer in *The Tennessean* began with a discussion on the rising wave of anti-LGBTQ legislation both in Tennessee and nationally. Two bills caught her attention: SB 1229, which allows parents to opt their children out of LGBTQ-related curriculum, and HB 0800, which, if passed, will eliminate all LGBTQ material from textbooks. The gravity of these bills is perhaps best demonstrated in her op-ed:

"In a world without Alan Turing, the United States would have lost World War II, some of over 300,000 Tennessean soldiers would have died, and the Axis might have conquered the globe.

"Imagine a future in which Turing and other lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) trailblazers are erased from history. What if the accomplishments of Sally Ride—the first woman and first LGBTQ person in space—could not be discussed in your fourth grader's science classes? Or if the legacy of Jackie Walker—a gay, record-holding linebacker from the University of Tennessee—could not be included your sixth grader's textbooks?

"Now stop imagining. This future is soon to be the present-day reality of Tennesseans."

Written under Professor Clark's mentorship as a College Scholars Program enrichment project, Brina's op-ed asserts that these "No Promo Homo" laws "lead to erasure of LGBTQ history, stigmatize LGBTQ populations, and can contribute to negative health outcomes among LGBTQ students."

After researching dozens of state laws and watching hours of Tennessee legislative sessions, she presented her findings to Vanderbilt's LGBT Policy Lab, who encouraged her to submit the op-ed for publication. Given its neutrality and reach, *The Tennessean* offered a platform for Brina to both cast a light on a critical issue of our time and urge Tennesseans to reflect and act.

"As the number of anti-LGBTQ policies increases in Tennessee, the ambitions and aspirations of countless LGBTQ children depend on us. Shouldn't they, like Ride, be able to aim for the moon?"



[The Vanderbilt Critical Psychiatry Conference \(VCPC\)](#), a student-led, one-day event directed by Joseph Sexton ('23), took place in January 2022. Critical psychiatry is an evolving field focused on improving mental health care by investigating its historical and political underpinnings. Sexton, who is also majoring in Cognitive Studies and Mathematics, initially grew interested in critical psychiatry during his first semester at Vanderbilt, when he took Professor Dominique Béhague's MHS 4010: Psychiatry, Culture, and Globalization, a "life-changing class," he said. Sexton's interests were further cemented through research with Psychology professors Steven Hollon and Judy Garber and MHS professors Ken MacLeish and Kirsty Clark, in areas that included the neurology of mental illness, vulnerability to suicide, and structural roots of psychological stress.

With the support of the Vanderbilt Mental Health Reform student organization and sponsorship from

MHS, Vanderbilt Behavioral Health, and Mental Health America of the Mid-South, Sexton organized the VCPC to bring awareness to the growing movement for mental health reform. The conference joined academics—including his mentors in MHS—with student scholars and activists and speakers from nonprofit organizations to discuss topics like the history of racism in American psychiatry, coercion in psychiatric care, and stigmatized diagnoses. Undergraduate and graduate students, including many MHS majors, presented their work on panels and in a poster session, and Professor Hollon delivered a keynote addressing controversies in the etiology and treatment of depression. Over 200 people from around the world, many of them clinicians, attended. "It was a privilege to be part of such a well-organized and inclusive event," said Professor MacLeish of the conference, "and to know that we were engaging an audience that cares deeply about these issues."



SOLIDARITY, INFRASTRUCTURE AND CRITICAL PEDAGOGY DURING COVID-19: LESSONS FROM BRAZIL

Above: Papo Reto for Béhague, “Volunteers working at Papo Reto” © Bento Fabio, Papo Reto

Even before the pandemic hit Brazil’s *favelas*, residents began organizing to protect themselves against both the novel coronavirus, and the government’s active suppression of effective public health action. Seasoned activists raised funds, mobilized donations, distributed food, masks, and hygiene kits, and wrote policies and manifestos. Volunteers signed up to learn basic first aid, walk door-to-door to check on neighbors, and drove through the streets using megaphones to educate residents about mask-use, social distancing, and handwashing. Residents converted closed schools into isolation wards and fought for the accurate documentation of Covid-19 deaths. International media outlets reporting on these actions have noted the resilience and altruism demonstrated by favela residents and activists, linking these qualities to the pressures of living in conditions of scarcity.

There is, however, far more to this picture—a “more” that is vital to broader discussions on civic engagement, public policy, democratization, and direct health impact. With her colleague, Francisco

Ortega, a professor at the [Catalan Institute for Research and Advanced Studies in Barcelona](#), Spain, MHS professor Dominique Béhague has initiated a research project to learn more about how mutual aid and solidarity networks are taking shape in Brazil’s pandemic landscape. In a forthcoming piece in [The Lancet](#), part of a series devoted to Global Social Medicine and edited by an international team of scholars, Béhague and Ortega argue that the way mutual aid works to enact social and health change is more in line with the field of social medicine—particularly in Latin America, where experts have long worked synergistically with grass-roots movements and public institutions to tackle the upstream forces affecting health. In another piece, co-authored with MHS student Trey Minter and published in both the U.S. and Spain, Béhague and Ortega extend their analysis to consider how favela residents have set up highly responsive and pliable data systems and mechanisms of redistribution, coupled with innovative forms of participatory research, critical pedagogy, and infrastructure building.



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about our program and the admissions process.



DISPATCHES FROM DR. CELINA CALLAHAN-KAPOOR’S POLITICS OF HEALTH CLASS

Caregiving, Multigenerational Homes, and COVID-19

By Anna Young ('21)

The purpose of this project was to use the COVID-19 pandemic as a lens through which I examine care and caregiving in multi-generational homes, focusing both on what the pandemic reveals about these care relationships and how the pandemic has challenged caregiving practices. I conducted virtual interviews with individuals in three multi-generational homes, in order to get first-hand perspectives on this topic. In one home, a nurse educator takes care of her husband, two young children, and sick father-in-law—both prior to and during the pandemic. In another, the pandemic created a multi-generational home as it spurred an elderly father to move in with his adult daughter and her family. The third home was that of my own family, since my older brother has lived with my uncle in my grandparent’s home for the past few years. Furthermore, my parents and younger brother had to temporarily move in with my grandparents due to the winter freeze earlier this semester. My aim was to combine these views and experiences into a collection of 55-word stories, with the goal of making people think about how COVID-19 has altered care relationships either within their own household or for other people in our communities.

“Mythical Creatures”

By Anna Young

“‘Mythical Creatures’ is told from the perspective of a woman who is the sole care provider for her family. In her home, she cares for her husband, her two young children, and her elderly, sick father-in-law, which results in little to no time to herself.”

*There are really no quiet moments for the primary caregiver.
For my husband, yes. But what happens if I leave the room? An
apocalypse. The end of the world.
Privacy and time to myself...
They don’t exist in my world except as
mythical creatures
that I hear about.*

Does sleep count as a quiet moment?



Above: "A Parent's Influence" by Cammi Murakami

Intergenerational and Intercultural Definitions of Good Parenting

By Cammi Murakami ('22)

I love when paintings tell a story. That is what I hoped to execute in my painting, "A Parent's Influence." On the left-hand side of the painting, an idyllic meadow scene is depicted to represent the relative freedom children enjoyed 40+ years ago. However, as a result of this "hands-off" parenting style, children who grew up in the 1970s and earlier lack the parent-child closeness that many families possess today. I hoped to capture this bittersweet sentiment by contrasting the vibrancy of the scene on the left with the monochromatic right side. Feelings of longing and regret are captured by the aging silhouettes on the bottom of the piece, one of which is reaching towards the apparent closeness of a mother and her young son. A recurring theme that arose throughout my interviews was the pervasiveness of media and parenting literature, which I used as the backdrop for my piece, as media was an influence felt by generations. Lastly, I bring attention to the woman sitting on the park bench with a red smoke emanating from her head with the words "Taisho" in Roman letters and Japanese characters looming in the clouds. This woman is a stand-in for my grandmother, who was a single parent throughout much of my father's upbringing. The red cloud looming over her head and her subsequent silhouettes (the silhouettes are supposed to be her as well) represent the Japanese cultural influence ingrained in her by her father. She called him a "Taisho," referring to a period in imperial Japan during the early 20th century. "Taisho" roughly translates to "great righteousness," a Japanese value her father strictly upheld during her upbringing. This attitude influenced how she raised my father and his brother; instead of valuing the modern parent-child dynamic, she valued financial and intellectual success, and focused on molding her two sons into conforming, law-abiding citizens.

COVID-19, VACCINES, AND A STUDY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, African Americans have fared worse than the general population with higher cases of infection and mortality from the virus. Given the introduction of vaccines, MHS student Victoria King ('22)—like healthcare professionals and policy leaders—hopes that the vaccines will help mitigate these disproportionate effects. Yet many African Americans remain vaccine hesitant. To explore this striking juxtaposition of higher contraction rates yet lower vaccination uptake, Victoria (pictured below, in the gold Vanderbilt sweatshirt) set out to understand the perspectives of unvaccinated or previously vaccine hesitant Black individuals.

In the study, funded in part by the [Vanderbilt Community Lab for the Intersectional Study of Black Women and Girls in Society](#), African Americans raised legitimate concerns surrounding the vaccines. Some connected their current reluctance to receive an immunization to previous instances of medical malpractice, most notably the Tuskegee Experiment where doctors intentionally withheld treatment from Black men in favor of continuing to study the effects of syphilis. Regardless of their reasoning, African Americans are taking the proper precautions to slow the spread of the virus, including masking and social distancing. At the conclusion of one interview, a participant expressed her gratitude with the study, sharing this was the first time someone had asked about her perspective on the vaccines without judgment.

Victoria hopes the data collected in this study will aid government and other policy leaders in creating targeted interventions to address the concerns of Black communities, and emphasize the importance of creating dialogue with people with differing views.





GLOBAL HEALTH AND PHYSICAL THERAPY

While taking Dr. Tara McKay's Global Health Crises class in her senior year, Haley Walker ('22) drew many parallels between the topics that she was learning about and her future career aspiration, physical therapy. Similar to doctors who travel to foreign countries to help vulnerable communities, Walker was fascinated to learn that physical therapists also travel to provide their services to these populations. While doctors attend to many patients at once and have little time to spend with each one, the timeline of rehabilitation requires that physical therapists spend more time with each patient. Knowing that there will be a lot of one-on-one time, it is essential that physical therapists understand not only the specifics of the region they are working in, but also the culture and situation of each patient. This is necessary to ensure that each individual feels respected and comfortable working so closely with their provider. Additionally, differences in culture and availability of resources may limit treatment options, resulting in physical therapists having to be more creative in their approach. In her graduate studies, Haley is curious in exploring the impact of situational and cultural differences on traditional Western physical therapy practice and how to best prepare physical therapists to work in these circumstances.





UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH FELLOWS ANALYZE THE “WAR ON COVID”

Since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, the language and imagery of violent conflict—“frontline workers,” “wartime” footing, the virus as “enemy”—have colored American political speech, shaped public imagination, and even informed policy. At the same time, populations affected by war, from servicemembers and veterans to populations displaced by conflict, have borne unique burdens and vulnerabilities associated with COVID-19. As part of MHS’s competitive undergraduate research fellowship, eight students spent Spring 2021 examining the crucial intersection between this global health crisis and war, security, and military institutions through interconnected projects, presented in detail on their [website](#). One set of studies focused on the relationship between rhetoric, policy, and public imagination. “If war is a metaphor, what does that metaphor mean?” Naomi Layton (’23) asked in the group’s final presentation, setting the tone for a series of analyses of war language that brought Americans together but also justified indifference, exclusion, or violent discrimination toward those regarded as disposable or as threats to health. Georgia Brown (’21) and Marisa Kim (’22) showed how these dynamics have become embedded in U.S. policies around

biosecurity and migration, and Annesa Dey (’22) analyzed their influence in the lack of policy supports for the country’s most vulnerable workers.

A second set of studies explored complex, sometimes counterintuitive effects of pandemic on military and veteran populations. Alice Wu’s (’21) statistical analysis found evidence that rural veterans in VA care may have been at increased risk of poor COVID outcomes. Ahalya Ramesh (’22) and Joseph Sexton (’24) analyzed the compounded burden of service-related stresses with the new challenges of social distancing and isolation, and found that pandemic’s effects on military and veteran mental health were strongly rooted in social and institutional contexts. And Berkeley Kendrick’s (’22) survey of servicemembers’ attitudes toward COVID vaccination revealed the key role of misinformation and mistrust of powerful institutions in vaccine hesitancy.

Because of the novelty of the topic, relatively little scholarship exists in these areas. Professor Ken MacLeish, who supervised the projects and whose own specialization is in medicine and the military in American culture, said, “It’s incredibly exciting to see students at the forefront of urgently important new knowledge.”



NIH GRANT/ PROJECT SPIRiT ADDRESSES HIGH RISK ADOLESCENTS

Above: Professor Kirsty Clark presenting research on supporting parents/caregivers of LGBTQ+ teens at the Anxiety & Depression Association of America (ADAA) Conference in March 2022

Since joining MHS, Professor Kirsty Clark launched Project SPIRiT (Suicide Prediction in Real-Time), which is funded by a \$700,000 grant from the National Institute of Mental Health. Project SPIRiT is a multi-year research project involving qualitative interviews with LGBTQ+ teens and parents/caregivers, a high-tech smartphone study that will collect longitudinal survey data from LGBTQ+ teens, and focus groups with clinicians and intervention experts in the U.S. South. The broader goal of Project SPIRiT is to develop a smartphone-based intervention to reduce suicidal ideation in high-risk LGBTQ+ adolescents. Dr. Clark's research lab includes MHS undergrads as well as graduate students from allied departments, including Psychology and Human Development.

In the past year, Dr. Clark has made strong connections with local leaders in the LGBTQ+ community including the Oasis Center, the largest LGBTQ+ youth-serving organization in Middle Tennessee. Together with Pam Sheffer, the Senior Director of Youth Action & Advocacy at Oasis Center, Dr. Clark is Co-PI of a Vanderbilt Institute for Clinical and Translational Research (VICTR) Community Partnership Development Grant to develop a supportive intervention for parents/caregivers of LGBTQ+ teens receiving mental health services at VUMC. Dr. Clark is conducting this community-based work alongside colleagues in the VUMC Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences. As Vanderbilt faculty, Dr. Clark is excited to continue working towards mental health equity for LGBTQ+ individuals in Tennessee and the broader U.S. South.

STUDYING REENTRY FOR FORMERLY INCARCERATED LGBTQ+ PEOPLE



Danait Isaac ('24) is an MHS major working with Professor Kirsty Clark on an undergraduate research project studying whether reentry programs meet the needs of formerly incarcerated LGBTQ+ populations in Nashville. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) people are overrepresented in the U.S. carceral system. Research shows that LGB people are incarcerated at nearly three times the rate compared to the general population, however little is known about the unique challenges formerly incarcerated LGBTQ+ people face when transitioning back to society (i.e., “reentry”). In Tennessee, there is only one reentry program specifically serving the LGBTQ+ community, and other existing reentry programs may lack the cultural competency or resources to meet the specific needs of LGBTQ+ people. In this qualitative study, Danait is conducting semi-structured, in-depth interviews with key informants (e.g., staff members, leadership, case managers) from nonprofit organizations and federal government programs in Nashville, who work with either the LGBTQ+ community and/or previously incarcerated individuals. The goal of this study is to

gain a better picture of the landscape of resources and support for those who identify as LGBTQ+ who have prior justice-involvement, and identify barriers and potential intervention points. The results from this study will provide recommendations and actionable steps for re-entry programs so that they can better serve the needs of formerly incarcerated LGBTQ+ individuals and prevent recidivism in a vulnerable population.



Cassidy Latchford ('23) is a double major in Child Development and MHS. Cassidy is conducting original research with Professor Kirsty Clark on the influence of peer norms on substance use among sexual and gender minority youth. Multiple studies have demonstrated higher rates of substance use among sexual and gender minority (SGM) adolescents compared to their cisgender, heterosexual (cishet) counterparts (Watson et al., 2020). For other populations with high and disproportionate use of substances, such as college students, homeless youth, active-duty military personnel, and veterans, there is extensive literature documenting how peer social norms of substance use are significant predictors and targets for interventions regarding substance use (Boyle et al., 2021). Many factors are thought to contribute to elevated substance use among SGM adolescents, but few studies have explored the influence of peer norms on SGM adolescents' substance use, and even fewer have evaluated the possibility of peer norms being a target for interventions regarding SGM substance use (Boyle et al., 2021). Cassidy and Dr. Clark aim to fill these gaps in the literature and analyze the influence of peer norms of substance use on SGM-related disparities

HEALTH DISPARITIES IN SUBSTANCE USE FOR GENDER MINORITY YOUTH



in substance use using data from the 2019 Minnesota Student Survey (MSS, N = 80,000+). Specifically, Cassidy will analyze the differences in substance use outcomes (e.g., alcohol, marijuana, prescription opioids) between SGM and cishet students. Then, she will use mediation analysis to determine if peer substance use norms (i.e., perceptions of whether one's friends believe substance use is wrong) mediates SGM-related substance use disparities. To conduct these analyses, Cassidy will use SAS and SPSS and plan to control for age, sex assigned at birth, race and ethnicity, and as a measure of socio-economic status, free or reduced-price lunch. Based on the analysis results, this thesis will propose possible areas of intervention related to peer substance use norms, especially for SGM youth who have high levels of substance use.

Vanderbilt University LGBT POLICY LAB

www.vanderbilt.edu/lgbt-policy-lab



WHAT WE DO

The Vanderbilt LGBT Policy Lab connects faculty and students across campus to broaden Vanderbilt's international reputation on scholarship surrounding the correlates, causes, and consequences of LGBT-related public policies



WHO WE ARE



College of Arts & Science

Kitt Carpenter**
Kirsty Clark
Cassy Dorff
Gilbert Gonzales*
Cindy Kam
Tara McKay*

**Director

*Associate Directors

Law School

Jessica Clarke

Divinity School

Ellen Armour

Peabody College

Luis Leyva
Matthew Shaw



2021 HIGHLIGHTS

- We moved into a dedicated suite in Buttrick Hall (344)
- VUSNAPS traveled to Atlanta to recruit participants
- Kitt Carpenter was awarded the Joseph A. Johnson, Jr. Distinguished Leadership Professor Award





- Kirsty Clark was awarded a Mentored Research Scientist Career Development Award (K01) by the National Institute of Mental Health and started teaching a new MHS course called LGBTQ Health Disparities



- Postdoc Sam Mann led an international conference called “Queer Populations, Policies, and Perspective” that had over 70 individual attendees across Europe, the U.S., and Canada



- LGBT Policy Lab affiliates published research in high impact journals: *JAMA Pediatrics*, *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, *Demography*, *Women’s Health Issues*, and others

- We applied for over \$5 million in external funding and earned competitive scores on new grant proposals

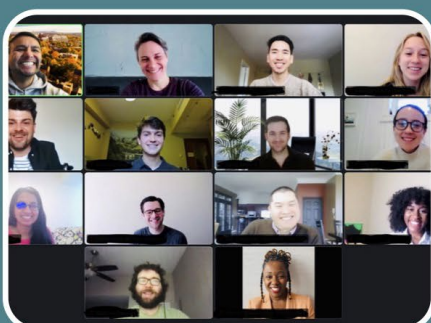


- Postdoc Harry Barbee participated in 2021 NIA-NIH Butler-Williams Scholars

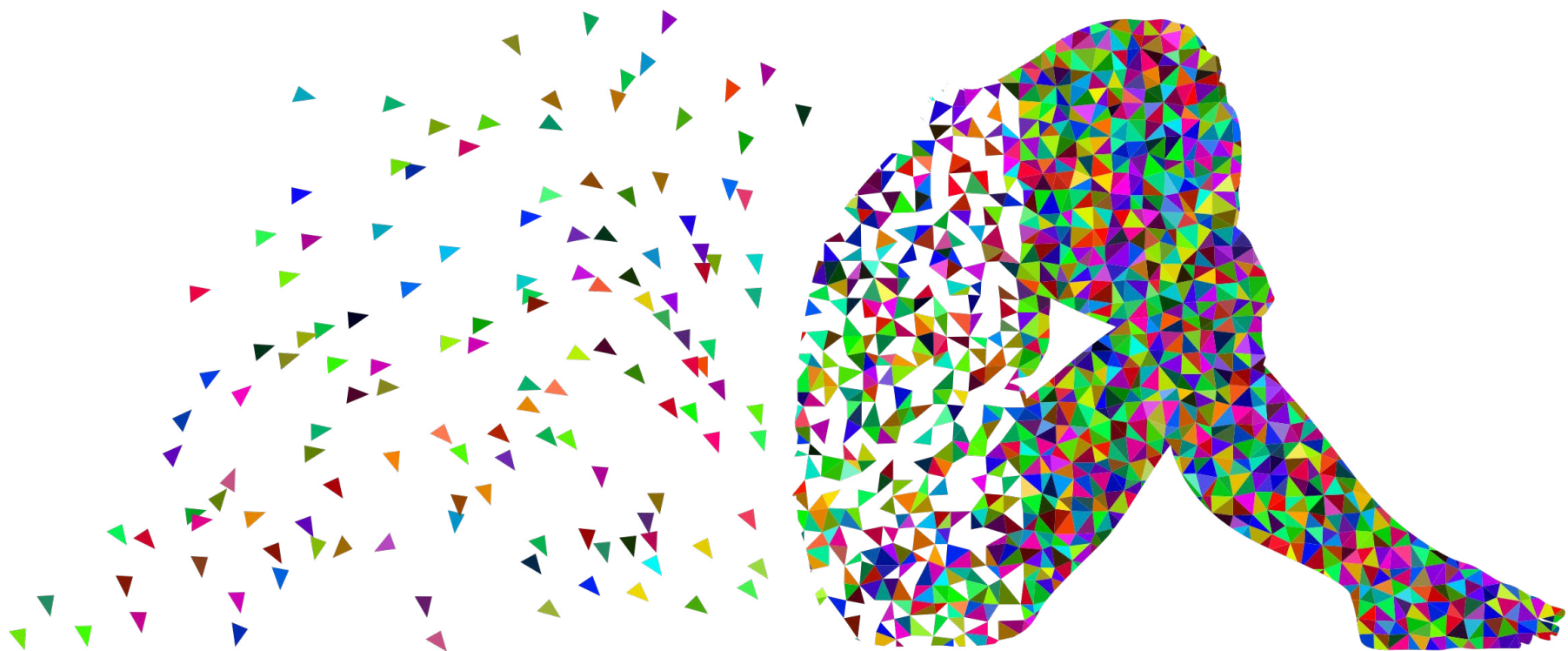


The Dartmouth Institute
for Health Policy
& Clinical Practice

- Former postdoc Ellesse Akre accepted a tenure-track faculty position at The Dartmouth Institute for Health Policy & Clinical Practice



- Undergraduate and graduate students presented LGBTQ research at major national and international conferences such as the American Public Health Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Swedish Institute for Social Research, and others



ASSISTANT PROFESSORS GONZALES AND MCKAY ENSURE LGBTQ+ AMERICANS ARE NOT LEFT OUT OF THE PANDEMIC RESPONSE

In the first months of the pandemic, COVID-19 exacerbated inequalities across the U.S. and disproportionately affected those who were already economically and socially vulnerable. Researchers and practitioners alike sounded the alarm about high rates of death, and disproportionate risks and impacts faced by racial and ethnic minorities, low-income communities, and children in low-income households. One group was noticeably absent from these alarms: sexual and gender minorities.

Noting the possibility that LGBTQ+ students might experience the impacts of COVID-19 differently, a group of students led by MHS seniors Lena Robertson and Emilio Loret de Mola asked professors Gonzales and McKay in April 2020 to help guide their research on how LGBTQ+ identified students were faring after the major disruptions of Spring semester. The findings were striking, and have gone on to be published in the [Journal of Adolescent Health](#). Many LGBTQ+ students were having

serious mental health issues that met clinical criteria, but no longer had good access to on-campus services. Many were struggling in their classes with assignments, routine, study space, and internet access. Some no longer had safe or affirming living arrangements.

At the same time, McKay was observing significant economic and social disruptions in her study of older LGBTQ+ folks in the U.S. South. Importantly, this was a group that was already more likely to be uninsured, food insecure, and living below the poverty line before COVID-19. Others experienced significant social isolation as lockdowns continued through May, with some folks reporting little or no contact with others, including family members, for days or even weeks at a time. These disconnects from community are important in the context of already more limited family interactions for some older LGBTQ+ adults.

McKay and Gonzales shared their

concerns about disproportionate impacts on LGBTQ+ Americans and LGBTQ+ people of color and, by mid-May 2020, had already completed data collection for a new, rapid assessment of the health, social, and economic effects of COVID-19 on LGBTQ+ Americans. This study revealed deep social and economic impacts, substantial behavior changes in the face of uncertainty, and sources of resilience. Gonzales also conducted new analyses from the Nashville Health Study to capture the disproportionate risk of infection for LGBTQ+ people in Nashville-Davidson County.

McKay and Gonzales used these results to develop a public webinar hosted by Metro Nashville council member Nancy Van Reece, the [Metro Nashville LGBTQ Caucus](#), and the Nashville-Davidson Mayor's Office to educate policymakers and community organizations and members about the need to ensure that LGBTQ+ people were not left out of the city's COVID-19 response.

Aimi Hamraie

MUTUAL AID GRADUATE COURSE, AND THE REMOTE ACCESS PROJECT



Image description: an olive-skinned person with short black hair and black glasses looks at the camera at an angle. They are smiling slightly. They wear a black-and-white checkered shirt, a green cardigan, and a bowtie made out of wood, which has a botanical look.

Contra*

Right: Artist and ASL interpreter [Brandon Kazen-Maddox](#) introduces the Remote Access Archive's call for submission on YouTube.



When the COVID-19 pandemic began, neighbors began connecting with one another to coordinate grocery pickups and share resources. Some people created funding campaigns, and “Pods” formed to facilitate education for K-12 students. These practices, known as “mutual aid,” have been central to marginalized communities for decades, especially to provide access to health resources. Now that they have become more mainstream, scholars and activists alike are asking questions about what makes mutual aid successful when public and private-sector resources do not address widespread human needs. MHS professor Aimi Hamraie’s graduate seminar on “Mutual Aid, Solidarity, and Activism” studied the use of mutual aid and care in health social movements working for race, gender, and disability justice. Several activists gave presentations in class and helped the students think through their projects. The students opted to engage in a semester-long simulation of a mutual aid collective as their primary assignment. Through this collective, they engaged in forms of peer-to-peer and collective care. They studied solidarity through a project with the Nashville Mutual Aid Collective, which took the form of preparing educational materials about mutual aid for outreach to the broader community.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, disabled people were using technologies to participate remotely in both work and social life. From the use of the telegram by Deaf people to the early adoption of web streaming and captioning in chronically ill communities, remote access has been a cornerstone of disability culture. Professor Hamraie’s [Remote Access Archive](#), funded through a grant by the Social Science Research Council, will present evidence of remote participation before and during the COVID-19 pandemic to enable researchers and community members to better understand this phenomenon. The archive also builds on a series of podcast episodes Hamraie produced on the COVID-19 pandemic for their [Contra* podcast](#).

Students and Alumni Making An Impact

KATARINA HARRELSON ('15)

Graduating in December 2015, Katarina Harrelson (nee Hickey) was an MHS major with particular interest in military medicine and patient narratives. For several months following graduation she worked in cardiovascular research as well as organ preservation for heart and lung transplants at Vanderbilt University Medical Center. Harrelson then spent three years working as a medical scribe in emergency medicine, urology, maternal fetal medicine, and dermatology. In July 2020 she began pursuing her osteopathic medical degree at A.T. Still University in Mesa, Ariz. She will spend years two through four at San Ysidro Community Health Center, working with underserved patient populations. Katarina is a recipient of the U.S. Navy's Health Professions Scholarship Program. She is currently a reserve officer and will serve as an active duty physician following graduation from medical school. As a medical student, she feels particularly appreciative of the multi-disciplinary exposure and knowledge base that her MHS degree afforded.



SYDNEY KOZAK ('17)



After graduating Vanderbilt in 2017, Sydney Kozak moved to Washington, D.C., to intern for her home state senator, Christopher Murphy (Connecticut). Unlike many of her colleagues, she was not a political science major, nor had she dreamed of working on Capitol Hill. However, after graduating and finding herself unsure of next steps, she decided that learning first-hand how the government works (or sometimes doesn't work) would be valuable to any career path. After her internship, Kozak secured a full-time position as a Staff Assistant and Intern Coordinator in Sen. Murphy's office. During her time working in the Senate, Kozak assisted the legislative team, hired and supervised interns, assisted constituents, and was able to meet some incredibly cool people. (Her highlight, pictured at left, is when comedian John Mulaney came for a Capitol tour!) She says there was something very special about walking through the ornate halls of the Capitol and remembering that this is your office. While she loved and highly recommends spending time working on Capitol Hill, she wanted to try something new, and decided that after a three-year break from school, she was ready to pursue a graduate degree. Come September, Sydney will attend the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University for a two-year master of arts in law and diplomacy.

As a Vanderbilt undergraduate MHS major, Anna Maybach ('17) worked in Dr. Mary Jo Gilmer's research lab, where she helped develop a vocational program method for medical students and practicing providers on how to speak with children about their diagnoses and prognoses, in order to involve the latter in the palliative care process.

After graduating from Vanderbilt, Anna completed a two-year, pre-med / post-baccalaureate program at Columbia University, with the intention of continuing on to medical school. During her postbac, she worked in a pediatric-neurobehavioral research lab. After years of interdisciplinary work in the MHS program and in Dr. Gilmer's lab, along with the perspective she gained at Columbia, Maybach realized that the true motivation to become a doctor was to facilitate large-scale change in medicine and research, in order to affect both policy and social impact.

In October 2019, Anna helped to file a new initiative that would re-authorize funding for the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine (CIRM), a bond-funded state institute that provides funding for stem cell research programs, in order to accelerate stem cell treatments to patients with unmet medical needs.

This initiative ultimately passed, authorizing \$5.5 billion for CIRM to continue its work in medical research.

Anna is grateful for the interdisciplinary knowledge gained through her MHS experience. "Being an MHS major really was the best part of my college experience, and it set me up to think critically and broadly about the medical field as a whole," she says. "I realized that though I completed the pre-med track, medical school was not the only avenue for me to make a difference in medicine and patients' lives." Having an in-depth understanding of chemistry and biology, as well as racial and ethnic health disparities, epidemiology, economics of health, medical anthropology, and social dimensions of health and illness, gave Anna the tools to pursue a career in medicine, with a deeper understanding of her job and its impact.

ANNA MAYBACH ('17)



LUWI SHAMAMBO ('19)



Luwi Shamambo has been keeping busy since graduating from Vanderbilt in 2019. In 2020, she spent a year serving as an AmeriCorps VISTA at Boston Medical Center. There, she worked with a telehealth team in the Pediatric Neurology department, managing a public health intervention program for youth with epilepsy. In August 2020, she started medical school at Emory University School of Medicine. Now a second year medical student, Luwi has written and published a reflection piece for the Journal of General Internal Medicine titled “Rethinking the Use of “Caucasian” in Clinical Language and Curricula: a Trainee’s Call to Action.” In the article, Luwi describes how, as a Black woman at a predominantly white institution, she has repeatedly encountered the problematic ways that physicians and medical students speak about race in medical curricula. She relates this back to her experiences during her gap year with AmeriCorps, where labels like “non-compliant” shifted how physicians interacted with patients and even patients’ views of themselves. In other instances, health risk behaviors casually metamorphosed into patient identities. With time, Luwi writes, “I found myself becoming increasingly distracted by the way race was inappropriately disregarded, unjustifiably overemphasized, and racial bias unknowingly perpetuated.” Read more about her experiences and call to action for institutions and individuals involved in medical training in her article. Congratulations, Luwi!



SHIFTING IDEAS ABOUT ZOOONOTIC DISEASE

By Chidiogo Nwakoby ('22)



Zoonotic diseases, those that jump from non-human animals to humans, are not new occurrences. COVID-19 is unique because of its rapid spread across the globe, and the severity of its impact on those affected. Additionally, the narrative surrounding COVID has been somewhat different. Repeated attempts to label it the “Wuhan virus,” which is in line with the tradition of officially naming diseases after their places of origin, were largely unsuccessful. The public response to COVID has also been different from that of Ebola, the last disease that threatened to reach pandemic status. The resurgence of Ebola in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2014–15 shone light on how social construction could affect public response. Although Ebola and COVID-19 are similar in that they are infectious diseases, the global response to the Ebola epidemic showed that the “Us v. Them” mentality is alive and well. The “Africanization of Ebola,” that is, the idea that Ebola is inherently an “African disease,” led to media statements that represented Africans as faceless and nameless people who needed to be “saved” by the West. This disregard of Africans as individuals may have informed reports of two French doctors discussing the possibility of using Africa as a testing ground for COVID-19 vaccines (Source: BBC). It is not enough to change the name of the disease; a more in-depth social upheaval is needed to shift the ideas that surround Africans and diseases. If another epidemic strikes in a non-Western country, the blame game is not one we should be playing. Rather, people in the West should ask themselves: would I act differently if the epidemic originated from here?

ANIVARYA KUMAR ('21)



Growing up, Anivarya Kumar had seemingly disparate interests in creative writing and medicine. It wasn't until she discovered the field of narrative medicine and the interdisciplinary nature of MHS that she saw how inextricably linked the two fields are. With a major in MHS and minors in neuroscience and South Asian Studies, she was able to pursue her passion for medicine and literature by integrating patient narratives into clinical care, and promoting health literacy in marginalized patient communities. Along with studying narratives of patients with schizophrenia at the Park Clinical Neuroscience Lab, she led an initiative to document patient stories at hospitals serving publicly-insured and medically-indigent communities as a clinical researcher for the National Institutes of Health.

Anivarya is now attending Duke University School of Medicine, and plans to use writing as a medium to advocate for patients whose voices are often silenced in healthcare.

Gaby Harder is a senior majoring in MHS and political science. For the last year, Gaby has been working on research in the Department of Health Policy at Vanderbilt University Medical Center under Ashley Leech, PhD, MS, and Alvin Jeffery, PhD, RN-BC. The project centers around advancing treatment outcomes for pregnant women with opioid use disorder (OUD), a population that disproportionally faces major barriers to care. In 2019, nearly 50,000 Americans died from opioid-involved overdoses, demonstrating the importance of this research topic.

Gaby conducted a comprehensive literature review of existing studies on the intersection between opioid use and prenatal care. Additionally, she is working on analyzing the efficacy of different treatment models by looking at health outcomes of mothers and infants. When pregnant women with OUD are treated with comprehensive services, including prenatal care, addiction care, psychiatric care, and social services, they have better outcomes. Gaby also researches state policies on opioids and is working on creating a data visualization on how laws have changed in the last 10 years.

After taking MHS professor Gilbert Gonzales's Health Care Policy in the U.S. class, Gaby was motivated to get involved in research that involved both her majors. Professor Gonzales was able to connect her to his colleagues working on topics Gaby was interested in. She says that "part of the reason I chose Vanderbilt was because of the MHS major and how it aligned with my academic interests and topics I am passionate about. The major has provided me with interdisciplinary knowledge that will serve me well even after I graduate this fall".

GABY HARDER ('21)



TAYLOR GUZI ('22)



This summer, through the Vanderbilt Undergrad Summer Research Program (VUSRP), MHS student Taylor Guzi will undertake research on the rise of mutual aid networks in response to COVID-19. Taylor's project is an outgrowth of research she conducted in the context of Professor Béhague's class, MHS 4010, Psychiatry, Culture and Globalization, which sought to explore how Hispanic communities maintain a more collective understanding of mental health and trauma when compared with Anglophone cultures. With funds from VUSRP, Taylor will expand on this research to explore the connections between mutual aid, mental health, and collective trauma during the COVID-19 pandemic. Her working hypothesis is that while mutual aid has intensified during the pandemic, it is also a way of responding to longer-standing historic and collective traumas experienced by marginalized populations. Taylor will interview activists in the Hispanic community in Nashville, as well as mental health practitioners working with Hispanic communities, to explore how professionals might become better sensitized to these histories. This research will help us better understand how to address the disproportional effect COVID-19 has had on the mental health of Hispanic populations. After the VUSRP program, Taylor will expand on her throughout the 2021–22 school year by working with Professor Béhague to investigate historical and cultural trauma as a part of her MHS Honors thesis.



Faculty Research & Student Collaboration

MHS Professor Hector Myers has been a co-investigator with colleagues at Vanderbilt Medical Center, Meharry Medical College, and the University of Mississippi Medical Center on a prospective study of the relationship between cumulative adversity exposure and daily pain intensity and impairment, as measured on altered HPA activity and altered sensitivity to experimental pain sensitivity at baseline, 6- and 12-months in a sample of 210 African American adults.

He is also co-investigator on a cross-sectional survey of 130 researchers with diverse backgrounds in precision medicine and health disparities research in the Collaborative Research Center on Precision Medicine & Health Disparities. Respondents categorized their background and activities as social/behavioral, genetics, both, or neither. Data were collected on categories of educational background, current activities, and level of agreement with 20 statements related to genomics and health disparities. Statistically significant associations were further analyzed using ordinal logistic regression adjusting for age, self-identified race/ethnicity, and gender. Of the 130 respondents, 50 (38%) identified as social-behavioral and 55 (42%) as genomic, and differed in their perspectives on only 3 questions: “Lifestyle and other life experiences influence how genes impact disease risk”; “Reducing disparities in access to health care will make precision medicine more effective”; and on “Racism and discrimination make me concerned about how genetic test results will be used”. This study was recently accepted for publication in the journal [Health Equity](#).

Hector Myers

PRECISION MEDICINE AND HEALTH DISPARITIES RESEARCH





The science fiction play *R.U.R* (Rossum's Universal Robots) by Czech writer Karel Čapek featured many themes related to fears about factory work in the early 20th century. References to the play persist in present day science fiction and policy regarding workers' rights.

Dani Picard

“THE ROBOTS ARE US” BBC PODCAST

MHS faculty member Dani Picard was featured on a BBC radio interview to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the play that coined the word “Robot.” The play, *R.U.R.: Rossum's Universal Robots*, was written by Czech playwright Karel Čapek, and quickly became an international sensation after its 1920 debut. The radio show examines the creation of the play, and the many ways that the idea of the robot still resonates today.

Professor Picard's work on the cultural history of robots documents how the term was bound up in conversations surrounding the development of industrial psychology in the early 20th century. The robot was a metaphor representing hopes and fears during a time when significant parts of western society were rapidly becoming industrialized and mechanized. The new field of industrial psychology positioned itself as trying to find a place for humanity in this emerging world.

The radio show can be accessed on the [BBC's website](https://www.bbc.com/culture/2020/06/200615-robot-100th-anniversary).



Above: Eric the Robot with R.U.R. inscription, taken at the London Science Museum by Dani Picard

Laura Stark

CRITICAL BIOETHICS AND FACULTY-STUDENT COLLABORATION

Professor Laura Stark, along with three MHS students, published a review essay in the July 2021 issue of the journal [Contemporary Sociology](#). The collaborative project emerged from a final project in Stark's course, Critical Bioethics. In light of their interests, Professor Stark invited Emily O'Brien, Jesse Pullen, and Rachel Gross to join her in collectively reading, discussing, and writing an essay review about an important new book in health ethics. (Other students in the Critical Bioethics course created a podcast episode with Professor Stark, in which they interviewed another book author for the New Books Network.)

The book, *Regulating Human Research*, by Professor Sarah Babb at Boston College, explains how Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) came to be oriented toward regulatory compliance rather than toward ethically protecting research participants, as was imagined in their earliest, most righteous moments. The book speaks to a larger conversation about how the U.S. government has struggled to support thick public discussions and decision-making practices around moral questions. Rachel, Emily, and Jesse graduated from Vanderbilt in 2020. Rachel continued on with MHS, earning a master of arts degree in Medicine, Health, and Society in 2021; Emily is pursuing a master of education degree at Vanderbilt's Peabody College; and Jesse now works in the field of clinical research.

Pictured top to bottom: Emily O'Brien, Jesse Pullen, and Rachel Gross



Martha Jones

INCLUSION ENGINEERING

The use of engineering tools, design, research, and thinking to create environments and capabilities whereby individuals who are under-employed or unemployed due to a physical disability or neurological difference are enabled to become fully-productive and employed members of society has been the goal of decades of research. At Vanderbilt, progress in these areas has been greatly facilitated by the proximity of the School of Engineering to our world-class Medical Center, and the close collaboration between engineering and medical researchers. However, these approaches have typically been siloed into categories such as rehabilitation engineering (which focuses on the amelioration of physical injuries). We propose that these and similar activities—aimed at empowering individuals with physical challenges and neurological differences to contribute their abilities to the workforce specifically and to society more broadly—constitute a new subfield of engineering that we call Inclusion Engineering. This subfield is one of [Vanderbilt Engineering's](#) “intellectual neighborhoods” that reflect interdisciplinary areas of strength.

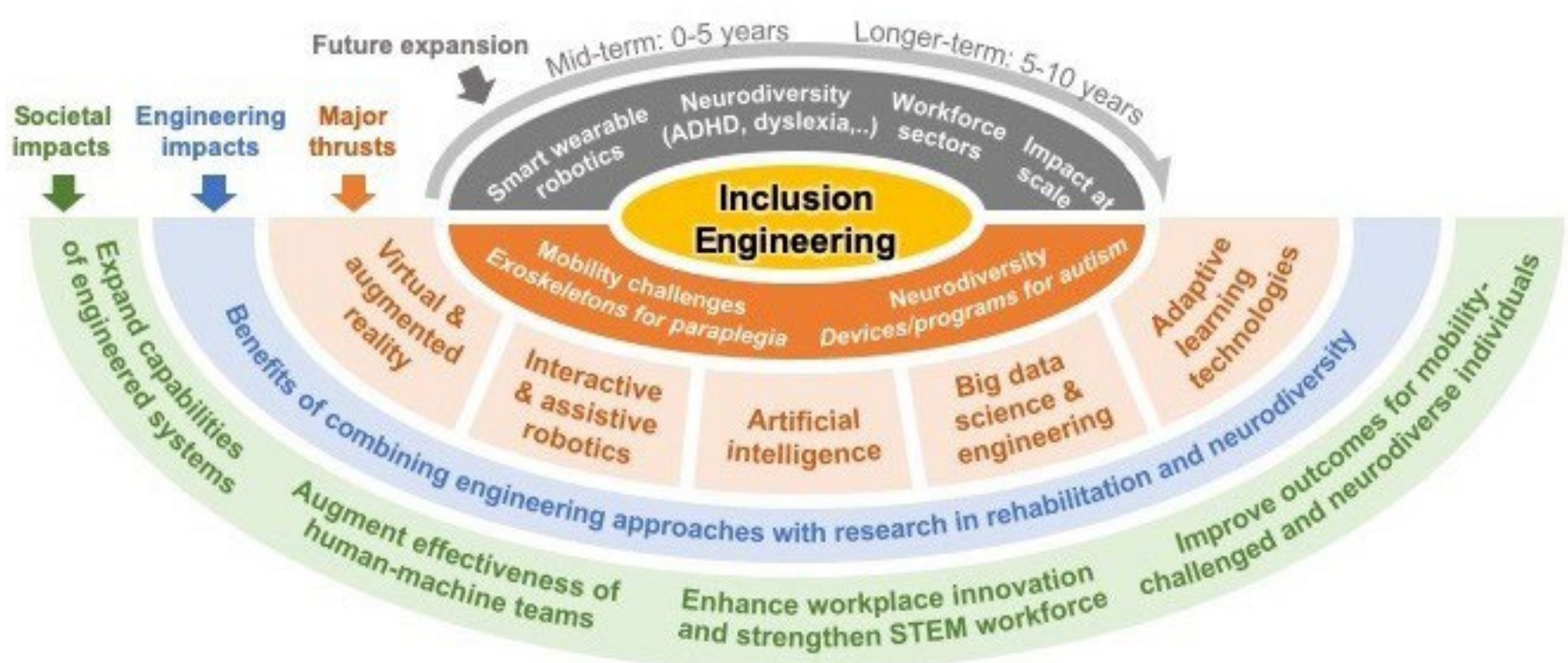
One of the major Inclusion Engineering

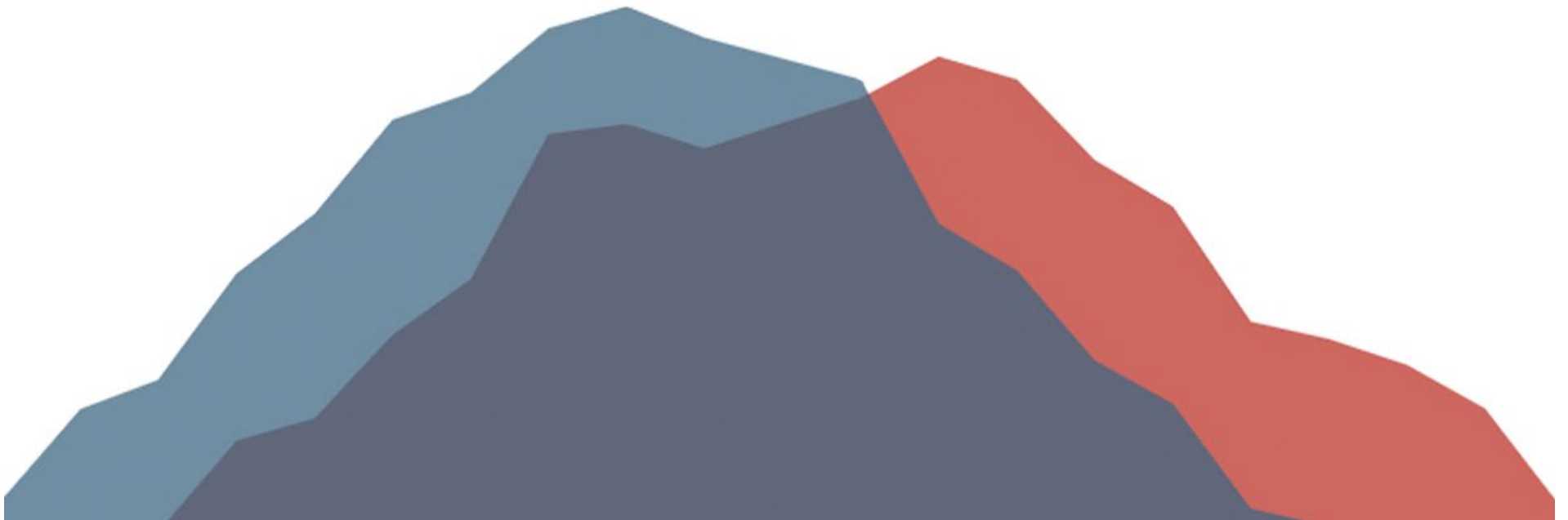
efforts addresses physical disability (e.g., amputation or spinal cord injury). As part of a broader effort to apply state-of-the-art robotics to resolve mobility impairment (including smart prostheses for amputees, and wearable assistive robotics), the work of researchers has been at the forefront of the development of intelligent powered exoskeletons for recovery, movement assistance, and fall prevention. Inventions at Vanderbilt University resulting in the Indego exoskeleton have been licensed to the engineering firm Parker Hannifin, and the device has been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

Another major Inclusion Engineering focus is to address the needs of individuals with neurological differences (e.g., those on the autism spectrum). At Vanderbilt University, extensive engineering research has focused on supporting neurodiverse individuals, such as a virtual-reality-based driving simulator designed to teach driving to autistic youth and adults, building and studying visual imagery-based artificial intelligence systems to better understand how neuro-diverse visual thinkers process information and experience the world around them,

and developing a computer-based, distributed, virtual space for multiple users to interact with one another and/or with virtual items to support flexible, safe, and peer-based social interactions that are difficult for children on the autism spectrum.

Perhaps the greatest impacts of Inclusion Engineering are the intangible benefits it can provide to individuals in terms of personal and financial independence. However, Inclusion Engineering can also provide society with considerable financial benefits by transforming cost into value, for example by reducing public support (safety net) costs as well as by adding value to society and the economy of the previously underutilized contributions to the workforce. This new sub-discipline of engineering asserts that the design of products or the built environment without considering diversity is fundamentally incomplete. Further, it asserts that challenges posed to diversities of ability in the current environment require active consideration of adaptive tools to broadly enable successful participation in the economy and society.





DEPOLARIZATION SUMMIT

Last November, Millions of Conversations, Vanderbilt University's Department of Medicine, Health, and Society, the Fetzer Institute, and former mayor of Charlottesville, Va., Mike Signer, came together to host a Depolarization Summit. This all-day summit brought together speakers from across sectors to discuss the problems of polarization and political violence, and to brainstorm solutions. Over 400 individuals registered for the event and attended throughout the day. This summit was a mere starting point for a larger collaboration among these organizations and individuals, whose goal is to expand dialog throughout 2021.

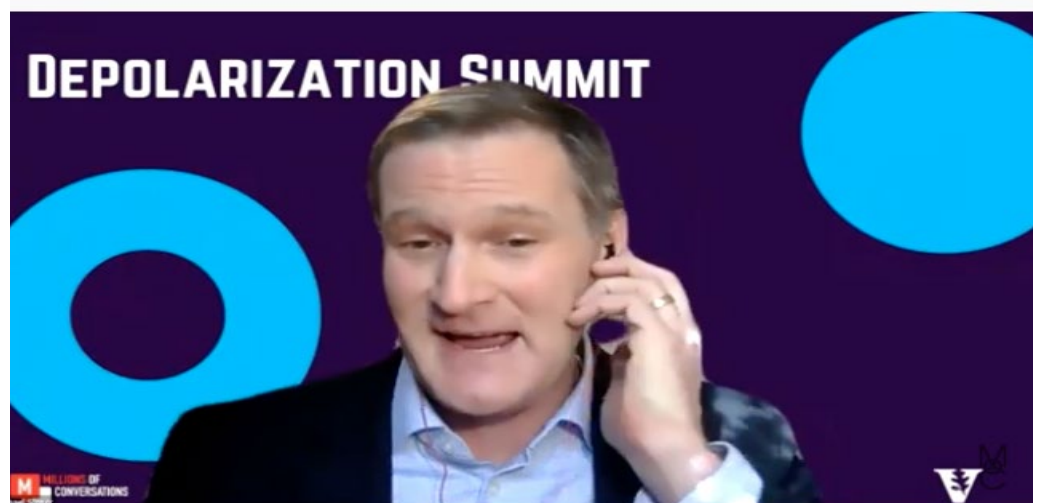
[+ Dr. Jonathan Metzl's Concluding Remarks](#)

[+ Full Recording of the Depolarization Summit](#)

[+ Playlist with Each Panel and Keynote](#)

[+ Resources and Post-event Email](#)

[+ NPR Coverage: *Right-Wing Embrace of Conspiracy is 'Mass Radicalization,' Experts Warn*](#)



While considering polarization and political violence in the U.S. following the 2020 presidential election, individuals working in defense, law enforcement, faith spaces, public office, civil society, corporations, media, and mediation came together to share ideas and plan for a depolarized U.S. Through a series of four workshops, participants shared institutional knowledge and collaborated for a more peaceable nation. It was noted that, regardless of the results of this election, the U.S. could expect increased polarization and upheaval that might intensify political violence.

The cohort of participants was diverse in political ideology; racial, ethnic, and religious background; and fields of work. Sharing experiences and best practices—and while not always in agreement—discussion and workshops provided participations with various perspectives on how to best address a polarized U.S.

Matthew Facciani

“HOW DID MASK WEARING BECOME SO POLITICIZED?”

The U.S. has lagged behind much of the world in its efforts to contain the COVID-19 pandemic. Not wearing a mask has become a political act even though masks slow the spread of the virus. As someone who just finished a dissertation on political bias, I was not surprised.

During the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a lot of uncertainty about the virus as scientists were still learning about it. This resulted in some mixed messaging from health organizations regarding the importance of wearing masks. Research finds that individuals turn to experts during times of national crisis, but the uncertainty from experts made political leaders a prominent source for guidance and clarity.

The message from American politicians was much more direct, but also differed substantially by political party. Democratic politicians generally took the virus much more seriously and quickly adopted mask-wearing behaviors compared to Republicans. President Trump consistently downplayed the severity of the virus and often refused to wear a mask. This created a clear political divide among politicians about how seriously they took the outbreak.

The Social Science of Political Bias

This division within politicians was internalized by the American people as well, according to research and surveys. Identifying as a Democrat was significantly associated with practicing social distancing and being concerned

about the virus. Additionally, Republicans were far less likely than Democrats to view COVID-19 as a major threat to public health, according to a recent survey by the Pew Research Center. Sixty-three percent of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents said that masks should be worn always, compared to just 29% of Republicans and those leaning Republican. Furthermore, 23% of Republicans said that masks should rarely or never be worn, compared to just 4% of Democrats. Finally, a recent CBS/YouGov poll showed that 57% of Republicans believed the number of U.S. deaths from coronavirus had been acceptable, compared to 10% of Democrats.

Once the decision to wear a mask became informed by political beliefs, it did not matter that scientists better understood the severity of the virus and the evidence in favor of mask wearing became clearer. Why? Research on identity theory shows that individuals are motivated to maintain consistency between the values associated with their identity and the information they encounter. The groups we identify with provide us with a sense of belonging and self-worth. Thus, if we identify with a political group, our psychological motivation is to process information in a way that supports the group we belong to.

This identity protection process was exactly what I found in my dissertation as well. Both Democrats and Republicans interpreted fictitious news headlines very differently, depending

on whether the headline was favorable or unfavorable toward their political group. This is consistent with a meta-analysis showing robust political bias for both Democrats and Republicans.

Political polarization is extremely strong in the U.S., which further perpetuates political bias. The political divide regarding COVID-19 has actually grown over time, despite our increased knowledge of the virus and the efficacy of mask wearing.

How does this divide continue despite the greater knowledge we have about the virus? Well, Democrats and Republicans trust and consume different news media. These media bubbles can lead to many Americans receiving news regarding COVID-19 that is biased toward supporting their political in-group. Democrats and Republicans each prefer to associate with people who share their political beliefs. Research has also found that political attitudes become more extreme after a group discussion with like-minded people. Additionally, a study of mine found that greater political homogeneity in one's personal network was associated with stronger political beliefs. This finding was replicated in my dissertation research, where I found political polarization was positively associated with having a greater proportion of close associates who hold similar political beliefs.

In summary, once misinformation becomes political, it is very hard to correct because of our motivation to protect our identity, and the reinforcement from our political echo chambers.



Matthew Facciani joined MHS in 2020 as a postdoctoral researcher working with Dr. Tara McKay on the VUSNAPS project. A major goal of the VUSNAPS project is to investigate how personal relationships are associated with health outcomes of older LGBTQ+ individuals in the U.S. South. Facciani also does research on social networks, political polarization, and misinformation. Beyond his academic research, Facciani has actively shared his research with general audiences and policy makers.

The excerpt above was first published at [The Conversation](#) on 9 September 2020.

Medicine, Health, and Society Graduate Students 2020–22

While earning her bachelor's degree in biological sciences from North Carolina State University, MHS master's student Cecile Saleh discovered her passion for interdisciplinary learning by minoring in Philosophy and Health, Medicine, and Human Values. In addition to school, she also kept full-time employment at various jobs, such as a home health aide and medical support for a summer camp. These positions contributed to Cecile's passion for health equity and access, giving her a hands-on introduction to ethical issues within the medical field. For her thesis project at Vanderbilt, she is researching structural competency in combination with colorblind racial theory. By looking at previous exit exams from MHS, Cecile is analyzing the ways in which students identify and analyze race when looking at a white person. This research will inform further recommendations for improvement of the curriculum. What's more, given the current state of race relations in America, as well as the commitment to helping fight systemic racism, this research is important for understanding how structures of privilege are unintentionally reinforced through a lack of analysis of whiteness as its own racial category. After completing her master's degree, Cecile wants to join an anti-racism organization to help implement better education in the workplace and in schools.

CECILE SALEH ('21)



GABRIELLE DYSON ('21)



Gabrielle Dyson is an MHS 4+1 master's student who graduated from Vanderbilt with a major in MHS and double minors in studio art and HOD. Throughout her time in the MHS program, and while making observations outside of her coursework, Dyson saw how race can play an important role in healthcare. With an interest in reducing health disparities and also in skincare, Dyson decided to combine the two aspects as the focus of her research. Dyson's thesis project examines the presence of racial bias in dermatologic training during medical school. Her research sets out to show where medical education can improve when dealing with dermatology education. To do this, she takes a look at medical school curricula to see if schools offer dermatology, and she also looks to see in what way race is portrayed in medical school, and specifically in dermatology education. Dyson's goal after the program is to pursue a career in dermatology and open her own practice to help decrease health disparities present in minority communities.

Isabella Schafer is conducting a practicum project in collaboration with Dr. Alexander Hawkins at the Vanderbilt University Medical Center. Her research focuses on the use of telemedicine as an alternative form of providing health care. More specifically, her practicum concentrates on a comparison of the physician-patient interaction within both telemedical and in-person appointments. In observing each appointment style and conducting a series of surveys, Isabella hopes to illuminate the differences in communication style, satisfaction, and patient outcomes within these clinic visits. Aside from pursuing a master's degree in MHS, Isabella is also an employee at the VUMC Department of General Surgery, where she aids in research-related endeavors. She also frequently shadows physicians in the clinic and operating room. After graduating from the MHS graduate program, Isabella hopes to attend medical school and use her newly-developed knowledge and skills to provide exceptional care to vulnerable patient populations.

ISABELLA SCHAFFER ('22)



KATIE PHILLIPS ('21)



Katie Phillips is an MHS 4+1 master's student who is interested in public health policy and economics. Her research focuses on the economic implications of various health policy measures implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in the U.S. Drawing on similar studies comparing European countries, Phillips finds that stricter COVID-19 policies, such as mask mandates, social distancing laws, and school and business closures, while initially causing greater economic losses, allow the economy to recover faster in the long term. Additionally, Phillips's research investigates inequality perpetuated by the COVID-19 pandemic and how health policy can impact this inequality, arguing that policy which does not adequately address social determinants of health will further exacerbate inequality and poverty. While completing her MA, Phillips has worked with a health technology startup, CoVerified, as a business analyst. After graduation, she will work for Optum as a healthcare consultant.

MA candidate Lauren Elcan's work draws from undergraduate anthropological research in Appalachia in 2016, and her job in natural language processing (NLP) and data analytics over the past two years. Each field has inspired her to better understand the intersection of polarization, public health, rural health inequities, and technology. During her research in Appalachia, witnessing the opioid epidemic and lack of overall healthcare, Lauren became interested in rural health norms and access, and how each contributed to individual and community perception, and the reception of new health technology. Prior to graduate study, Lauren worked at an NLP technology company where she was constantly interpreting how information is messaged and spread, piquing her curiosity in what this means for information around health technology. Elcan is working on two projects during MA study. The first is with Dr. Metzl, studying polarization around healthcare policy and technology, and creating a strategic, go-to-market framework for new health technologies. This would allow for the fastest, widespread adoption and the least friction to diverse markets. Second, for her thesis, Lauren is conducting a market analysis of how and where private, early-stage health tech companies can solve rural health inequities where the public sector has traditionally fallen short.

After completing her graduate degree, Elcan plans to continue in the world of health tech and join an early-stage company, where she will further her thesis research with commercial applications.

LAUREN ELCAN ('21)



MADISON NOALL ('21)



Madison Noall is a master's candidate in the MHS 4+1 program, and her practicum project is on developing a conceptual framework for interdisciplinary collaborations in psychiatry. During her sophomore year, she began working as a research assistant with the Developmental Affective Neuroscience Lab, under the guidance of Dr. Jennifer Urbano-Blackford. Noall assisted in clinical research on anxiety and anxiety neurocircuitry with a specific focus on patients with schizophrenia, and children with anxiety disorders. It was in this setting that Madison became interested in researching methodologies that could better the diagnoses and treatment of complex disorders faced by the field of psychiatry. Her practicum project combines ethnographic observations in the clinical and research setting with formal literature, in order to illustrate how an interdisciplinary approach to understanding and treating psychiatric disorders can benefit a wide range of patient populations.

Having graduated from the MHS 4+1 program in May 2021, Madison will now attend medical school, where she plans to integrate her MHS background into both her medical education and her future career as a practicing physician.

Olivia Post graduated from the MHS 4+1 program in August, 2021. Motivated by the events of the COVID-19 pandemic, her research interests include racial/ethnic health disparities, public health communications, and medical resistance in the U.S. Olivia's thesis research investigates vaccine hesitancy/resistance and whiteness through vaccine-advocating public service announcements from institutions such as the Academy of Country Music. From the MHS curricula and critical race theory, she focuses on the way in which race informs health practices in the U.S. As the coronavirus pandemic has unfolded, patterns of resistance to health initiatives have exposed ideological rifts between certain subpopulations. Vaccine rollout has shown decreasing minority hesitancy, yet steadfast resistance from certain white groups, especially those who are right-leaning. It is not a secret that Tennessee is a historically conservative state; therefore, Post intends to analyze public health announcements geared towards Tennesseans, to uncover attitudes and judgments held about vaccine-resistant individuals. Exploring social determinants of vaccine hesitancy will hopefully reemphasize the need to scaffold public health efforts differently for various races, genders, and political orientations.

OLIVIA POST ('21)



AARON HUNT ('22)



Aaron Hunt graduated from Vanderbilt with a double major in MHS and political science and a minor in sociology. During his time at Vanderbilt, Aaron has observed and researched the role diversity plays in healthcare and education. Specifically, his research investigates how increasing the presence of underrepresented minorities in research fields would accelerate progress. He has worked closely with colleagues in MHS and the Peabody School of Education to research this. Aaron believes that when we bring diversity into the equation, we allow for unique perspectives and ideas to contribute to advancement. He has found that representation has a multiplying effect and creates role models for future generations. His research also highlights the benefits of such role models. After the MHS Master’s program, Aaron will attend law school, where he hopes to use law in conjunction his interdisciplinary research skills to effect change.

Karrie Jane Raymond (she/her) is a master’s candidate in the Medicine, Health and Society (MHS) 4+1 program. Drawing on research on racial inequities in mental health, Karrie’s work highlights the need for culturally responsive care in higher-educational institutions. Karrie’s practicum is also inspired by her personal experiences seeking mental health services as a Black woman. The work explores representation and diversity in college mental health services with a focus on Vanderbilt’s University Counseling Center (UCC) and how to best promote well-being for students with marginalized identities. Through a critical literature review, key informant interviews, and background research, Karrie examines the transformative changes in 2020 made by the UCC in response to the pandemic, increase in racially-violent events, and sociopolitical climate. To do this, Karrie showcases the timeline of the UCC’s progress whilst proposing new initiatives to promote engagement and diversity within services. Furthermore, diverse and representative mental health services are prioritized rather than simply increasing the quantity of services. This practicum will serve as feedback as well as an improvement strategy plan to increase equitable access across varying marginalized student populations, such as Black graduate students. Ultimately, Karrie wants to pursue a career in health advocacy and health education in order to destigmatize the mental health field and improve health equity.

KARRIE JANE RAYMOND ('22)



ANYSSA FRANCIS ('22)



Anyssa Francis is a master's candidate in the Medicine, Health, and Society (MHS) 4+1 program, graduating in May 2022. She received her Bachelor's degree from Vanderbilt University Spring of 2021, after majoring in MHS and minoring in Chinese Language and Culture studies. Motivated by her vested interest in the accessibility of healthcare in the U.S., her research interests include racial/ethnic health disparities, maternal and child health, as well as immigration status as a determinant of health. Anyssa's practicum investigates the impact of gentrification and changes in transportation accessibility within Little Haiti, Fla., on Haitian residents' ability to maintain food security and affordable healthcare. Utilizing key informant interviews, ArcGIS bus route data, and StoryMaps software, Anyssa intends to create an interactive presentation that shows how accessibility and transportation are not only intertwined but can impact many facets of health on a micro- and macro-level. Exploring this data will be a reminder that immigration status and treatment of immigrant communities can function as a fundamental cause of health and should be treated as such. Upon graduating, Anyssa hopes to pursue a profession in Public Health, focused on maternal and child health as well as determinants of health for immigrant populations in the U.S. Afterwards, Anyssa intends to return to school to obtain her medical degree and work within the pediatric population.

Madison Goldsborough is a graduate of Hampton University, where she majored in psychology with a concentration in pre-medicine. Madison's research interests are centered around sexual health disparities that impact youth due to the lack of mandated sexual education curriculums in Tennessee. Her research interests were inspired by her internship at the Oasis Center. During her work at the Center, Madison spent a lot of time with at risk youth staying in the shelter, and she saw first-hand how the lack of proper sexual health education could have profound impact on a developing life. While in the MHS, MA program Madison will be working with the Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center to develop a comprehensive and inclusive sexual health curriculum, as well as a training program for their interns.

MADISON GOLDSBOROUGH ('22)



CATHERINE TERRACE ('22)



Catherine Terrace is a master's candidate in the Medicine, Health, and Society program, and will be concluding her degree in August 2022. Before moving from San Antonio, Tex., she graduated from Trinity University in May 2019, where she majored in anthropology with a minor in political science. In the graduate program, her research has focused on disability justice, architecture, and critical access studies--interests she has pursued in collaboration with Professor Aimi Hamraie in their Critical Design Lab. While completing her MA, Terrace's practicum project focused on her role as a graduate assistant within Vanderbilt University's Student Access Office, analyzing the role of disability service offices within universities. After graduation, Catherine plans to pursue a career focused on access advocacy within nonprofit or educational settings.

McKenzie Yates is a 2022 Master's candidate in the Medicine Health and Society 4+1 graduate program. She also works as a graduate teaching assistant and student researcher. In undergraduate she majored in MHS with a concentration in behavioral and health science with a minor in African American and Diaspora Studies. Her interests generally lie in mental health studies, minority well-being, and community building. This academic year McKenzie worked with the Vanderbilt University Medical Center's Racial Equity Task Force to conduct archival research in the Eskind Biomedical Library to investigate instances of racism, discrimination, and social in/justice in VUMC's history. McKenzie's thesis focuses on the exploitation of Black, low-wage, janitorial staff which is analyzed through the case of custodians body-snatching from local cemeteries to replenish the anatomy department's cadaver supply, and the absence of effective Affirmative Action protocol through the 1960s and early '70s. McKenzie completed her thesis defense in February and hopes to make edits to complete a monograph for the committee deliverable. After graduation, McKenzie is shifting gears, heading to New York City to complete a PR internship with Paul Wilmot Communications' fashion department.

MCKENZIE YATES ('22)



MYRA KONTE ('22)



Myra Konte gained her undergraduate degree at Vanderbilt University where she studied Medicine, Health, and Society. She graduated in May of 2021. She then went on to join the Medicine, Health, and Society graduate program. While conducting her undergraduate studies, she was also playing collegiate soccer. Her research includes analyzing the mental health of Black Male athletes at Vanderbilt. She is creating a survey to assist in creating an environment where these athletes are more comfortable in accessing mental health services at Vanderbilt. Her interests include accessible mental health services in marginalized communities and providing services in which elevates these communities, so their voices and opinions are heard. Her future plans include playing professional soccer for a couple of years then moving on to nursing school where she will study to become a pediatric nurse practitioner.

Amira Vivrette is a master's candidate in the MHS 4+1 program. Her undergraduate double majors in MHS and sociology strongly influenced and shaped her graduate research interests. Through the 4+1 program, Amira focused her studies on human trafficking and the ways in which the injustice is addressed and studied. After taking a course on Social Networks and Health through the MA program, her interest in social network analysis grew. For her thesis, Amira decided to explore how social network analysis has been applied to study criminal enterprises, and why it should be used as a methodology to study human trafficking enterprises. Through a comprehensive analysis of literature on social network analysis and its application to criminal networks, Amira found that this methodology has significant value as an approach to understanding human trafficking network operations. She found that though organized crime networks may be well structured, they can be destabilized or disrupted by targeting prominent members and weak ties within social networks. Her thesis titled, "Approach to the Global Human Trafficking Crisis: Analyzing Applications of Social Network Analysis," calls for future researchers to use social network analysis to better understand the inner workings of human trafficking networks. Her hope is that future applications of social network analysis to human trafficking will aid in the development of well-informed interventions for caring for survivors of trafficking. Additionally, she believes this multidisciplinary approach to study and prevent human trafficking has great potential to bridge agencies and facilitate collaboration among professionals in the fight against human trafficking.

AMIRA VIVRETTE ('22)



JESSICA CREEDON ('22)



Jessica Creedon is a master’s candidate in the MHS program and student-athlete on the Vanderbilt track and field team. After graduating from Boston College with a degree in neuroscience and a minor in Management and Leadership, Creedon decided on the MHS graduate program to enrich her understanding of health as both a product of neurobiological mechanisms and societal influence. For her thesis project at Vanderbilt, Creedon builds on this interest to examine how youth mental health and the COVID-19 pandemic interact with and are fundamentally driven by social determinants of health. Under the guidance of Dr. Kenneth MacLeish, Creedon weaves together concepts from medical anthropology, public health, and neuroscience to describe the complex etiology of youth mental illness during the COVID era.

Creedon’s penchant for interdisciplinarity extends to her athletic endeavors as a student-athlete on the Vanderbilt track and field team. She specializes in the heptathlon, a combined event contest made up of seven track and field disciplines. After graduation, she will work as a healthcare consultant.

Madiya Harriott is a native of Fort Lauderdale, Fla., and a Vanderbilt soccer alumni. She is currently in the Vanderbilt MHS 4+1 master’s program. Madiya graduated from Vanderbilt University with a double major in MHS and child development, along with a minor in psychology. In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, Madiya realized the importance of empathy in workplaces. Staff in organizations, especially in the medical field, experienced burnout. Her research interest soon turned into an emphasis on the importance of mental health and the need for empathy, understanding, and flexibility in the workplace. Since she was a previous student-athlete at Vanderbilt, she was inspired to work with Vanderbilt athletics and their approach to mental health. She focused her research on Black male student-athletes. She created a survey that focused on their individual experiences with Vanderbilt athletics and their approach to mental health. She plans to shed light on the difficulty for black males to feel comfortable in asking for help due to stigma and culture. To do this she plans to create an intervention program for athletics to use in the future specifically for their athletes in the minority population. After graduating with her masters, she plans to apply to Nurse Practitioner school and specialize in pediatrics or psychiatry.

MADIYA HARRIOTT ('22)



ODALYS ARBELAEZ ('22)



Odalys Arbelaez is an MA student who received her bachelor's degree in biology and French from Drew University in May 2021. Her research focuses on understanding how the political institutions in the U.S. are influencing healthcare messaging and decision making among the public. Odalys' thesis project examines the extent to which American parent's own political leanings and partisanship influences their decision to have their young teen and adolescent receive the COVID-19 vaccine. Given the events of the past two years, society has seen how both sides of the political aisle have politicized the COVID-19 pandemic, subsequently impacting how the general public responds to public health interventions regarding the pandemic. In creating an anonymous online survey that is advertised on social media platforms, she intends to provide parents with the opportunity to express their concerns or thoughts regarding politics, the COVID-19 vaccine, and their own beliefs regarding their child's health status. Understanding the influence that political messaging has on health interventions during a public health crisis can be crucial in addressing issues of vaccine hesitancy and mistrust in healthcare institutions.

Esther Park is an MHS 4+1 master's student who graduated from Vanderbilt University with a major in MHS, with a minor in psychology. In her time in the MHS program, Esther also worked as a physical therapy technician at Elite Sports Medicine and Orthopedics which led her to research disparities in physical therapy. Esther's practicum project examines the need for more physical therapists in rural areas as most physical therapists are located in urban and suburban areas. Through a story mapping website using ArcGIS, Esther was able to map out physical therapy clinics in the greater Nashville area in order to illustrate the concentration of the clinics and provide a recommendation on how to tackle the lack of physical therapists. After completing her master's degree, Esther will continue to work at Elite Sports Medicine and Orthopedics while applying to physical therapy school in the future. She hopes to attend either Emory University or Army-Baylor DPT programs.

ESTHER PARK ('22)



PHOENIX GANDY ('22)



Phoenix Simone Gandy is an MA student whose undergrad degree in health science with a concentration of public health, along with her love for dentistry, influenced her graduate enrollment with MHS. Over the years, Gandy has accumulated an abundance of shadowing hours in dentist offices, both in the U.S. and internationally. Because of this, Phoenix became interested in both health and dental insurance disparities, and the lack of dentist utilization in minority communities—two salient issues that impact those in need of dentistry assistance, but who do not follow up with appointments. For her thesis, Phoenix is working with Dr. Hector Myers of MHS to analyze African American attitudes towards dental utilization, and the structural and personal barriers that could affect them. The project is a descriptive survey analyzing the structural barriers and personal shared experiences of African Americans’ lack of dental care utilization. Gandy seeks to discover the leading structural and personal trends that affect the choices and understanding African Americans have toward seeking dental services. With her findings, Phoenix aims to bring insight to and structural understanding of the inner workings of a vulnerable population which is inadvertently affected by its surroundings.

Rachel Gross is an MHS 4+1 master’s student whose research considers structural competency as a tool to train health professionals that poor health outcomes are rooted in upstream, structural barriers. Rachel’s research uses food insecurity as a case study to illuminate the need for a common language to discuss and address structural healthcare issues. For her master’s thesis, Gross worked with Dr. JuLeigh Petty, MHS Director of Graduate Studies. Gross wrote and tested a health vignette that describes a patient recently diagnosed with diabetes who faces structural barriers to health. The vignette included a written assessment that tests respondents’ ability to identify signals of food insecurity, to understand food insecurity as a structural issue, and to apply structural competency to a problem. The work will be included in a comprehensive structural competency training program for medical students and residents at Vanderbilt and beyond. Gross has also been working at the Nashville Food Project, where she delivers made-from-scratch meals to food-insecure communities. Her MHS research grounds her in her social justice passions and will inform her own clinical practice, as she plans to pursue a career in medicine.

RACHEL GROSS ('21)

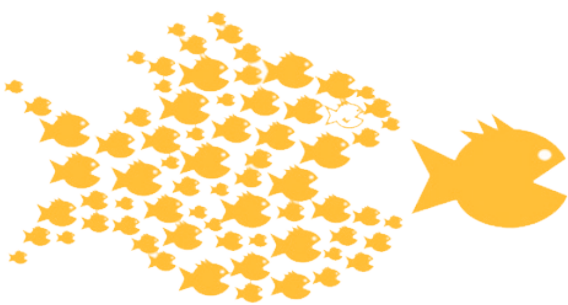


SARAH MARRIOTT ('21)

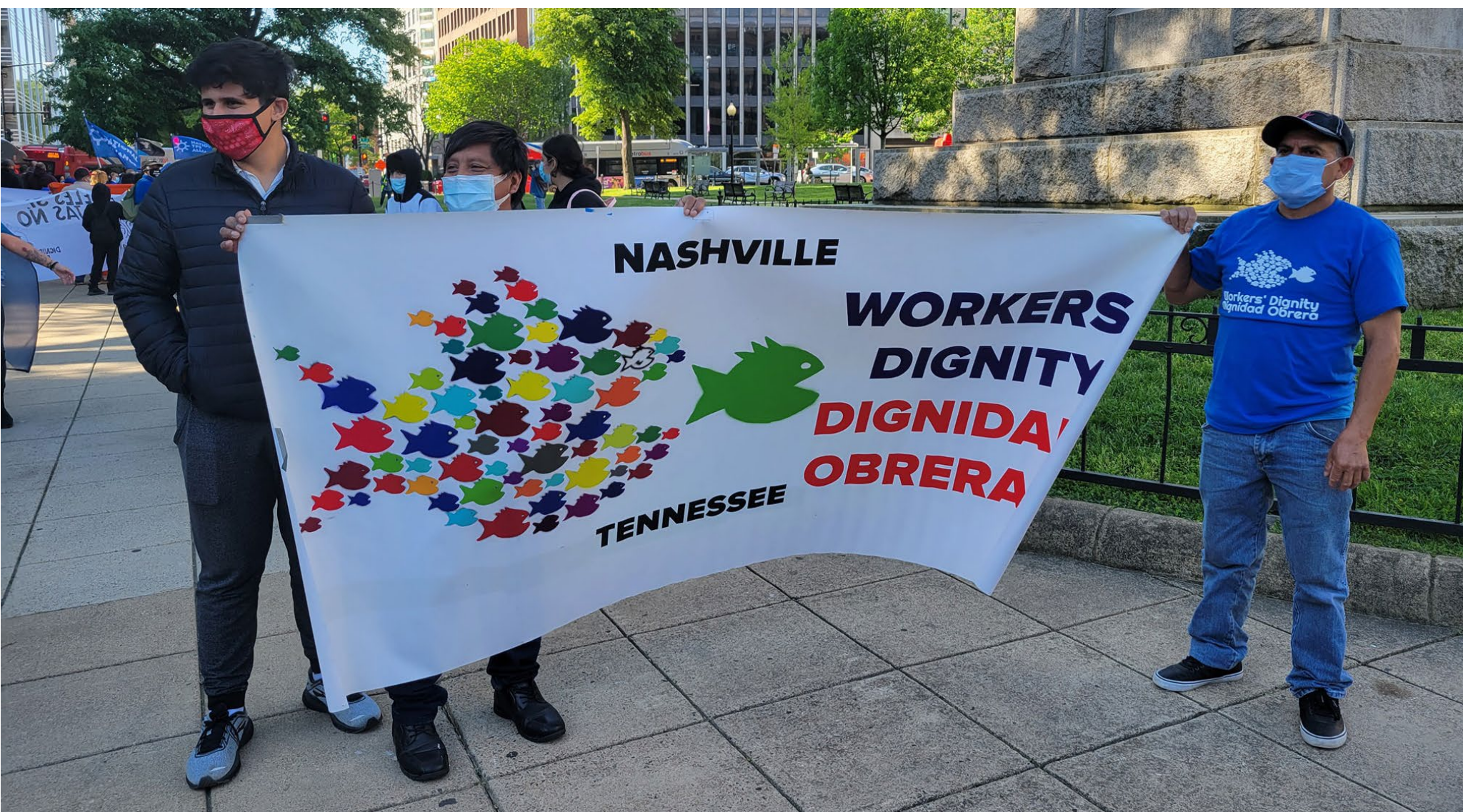


MHS master's candidate Sarah Marriott graduated from Vanderbilt in 2020, with a double major in MHS and Spanish. As an undergraduate, she was especially interested in interdisciplinary health research and health justice for vulnerable populations, two passions which she now explores at the graduate level. While completing the master's program, Marriott also works remotely as a Princeton in Latin America fellow, assisting a community health nonprofit in Santiago Atitlán, Guatemala, called Pueblo a Pueblo.

Her master's research explores the experience of Latinx immigrant workers as they navigate U.S. healthcare and social support infrastructure. Combining a passion for ethnographic research methods and community engagement, Sarah is investigating this subject area by working alongside Dignidad Obrera/Worker's Dignity, a grassroots worker's justice organization here in Nashville. Through participant observation, survey and interview data, and direct support work, Marriott aims to highlight the many structural barriers that exist for Latinx immigrant workers seeking health care in the U.S. Her research will investigate the growing injustice of uncompensated workplace injury, and will focus specifically on the process of accessing Workers' Compensation. With the support of the workers themselves, her research seeks to suggest ways in which the Tennessee Workers' Compensation system can more equitably meet the needs of immigrant workers. Her research will center the narratives of folks she has met at Dignidad Obrera/Worker's Dignity, as she believes those with firsthand experience of a crisis are best poised to both describe it and ideate solutions.



[Dignidad Obrera / Workers Dignity](#)



LAUREN GAITHER ('21)



Lauren Gaither is an MHS 4+1 master’s student from Dayton, Ohio. She graduated from Vanderbilt University with Honors in Medicine, Health, and Society and minors in biological sciences and German. During her time in the master’s program, she pursued a practicum project with Vanderbilt’s employee health and wellness program, Go for the Gold. Go for the Gold offers programming and incentives for Vanderbilt University and Vanderbilt University Medical Center employees in an attempt to increase mindfulness and healthy habits. During her semester there, she assisted with several projects that enabled the program to expand its influence on the Vanderbilt community. She analyzed survey results evaluating the efficacy of the wellness program and noted valuable suggestions concerning availability and inclusion to be implemented in the next year. She also worked with the marketing and external communications team to create a program narrative that was concise and comprehensible to all Vanderbilt employees. During her time with Go for the Gold, Gaither was able to encourage increased participation and make recommendations that increased efficacy and program awareness. These efforts enabled the Vanderbilt community to better access the wealth of knowledge that Go for the Gold provides. Gaither hopes to use her data analytics and marketing skills in her future work.

MILAN SEVERINO ('22)

Milan Severino is a graduate of Vanderbilt University where she majored in Medicine, Health, and Society with a concentration on health behaviors and health sciences. She conducts research alongside the Department of Pediatrics at Vanderbilt University Medical Center to investigate interventions for childhood diabetes in Hispanic populations. While in the MA program, she will be working alongside Professor Aimi Hamraie. Following her graduation, Severino will continue her education by pursuing a doctorate of medicine.



GLORY STANTON ('22)



Glory Stanton is a Utah native by way of southern Mississippi. She obtained her Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Utah, where she majored in Health Promotion and Education (Provider-Health) and minored in sociology (health emphasis). During her undergraduate studies, she participated in the Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Program and the Undergraduate Research Scholars program conducting research with her mentor, Dr. William A. Smith, on Racial Battle Fatigue and anti-Black Misandry in Black boys and men living in predominately white communities. She co-authored two publications while working with Dr. Smith.

Glory accepted admission to Vanderbilt University in the Medicine, Health, and Society MA program

primarily because of the program's flexible interdisciplinary structure. Her research interests include focusing on the intersections and legal policies between racial health disparities, bioethics, and human rights/civil rights law. While in the master's program, she has worked with Dr. Jonathan Metzl. Her practicum work centers on how the U.S. court systems may be complacent in aiding in the growing morbidity rate of death by legal intervention for Black boys and men.

Upon graduation, Glory will pursue a career in law, where she will continue to focus on the intersections of bioethics, racial battle fatigue, and the law. She hopes to ultimately become a federal judge, with an end goal of promoting a quality life for the Black community and other vulnerable populations while demanding accountability from those in positions of power abusing their authority. Her life's mantra is best said by the honorable Malcolm X, "If you don't stand for something, you will fall for anything."

ASHLEY MULLEN ('22)

Ashley Mullen is a graduate of Vanderbilt University, where she majored in history and Medicine, Health, and Society. Throughout her time in the MHS MA program, she had studied health policy, healthcare finance, and data analytics. During her last semester in the program, Mullen decided to do an internship at LifePoint Health in Brentwood, Tenn. Through the internship, she studies population health: a public health initiative to make communities healthier by decreasing readmissions, lowering costs, and decreasing the length of stay in hospital facilities. Through the internship, she is able to combine her passion for studying the social determinants of health and her knowledge of data analytics. After she graduates from the MHS MA program, she will be applying for jobs in hospital administration or the healthcare consulting field.



EMILY HALVORSON ('22)



Emily Halvorson is a graduate of the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, where she majored in psychology and Spanish. Emily’s research interests fall under the umbrella of health psychology, and include topics such as adverse childhood experiences and resilience, to microaggressions and health sequelae. While in the Medicine, Health, and Society MA program, Emily researched limitations of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Illnesses (DSM-V) and criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) when applied to individuals who experience insidious racialized trauma. At Vanderbilt, Emily also worked with Dr. Bill Heerman’s lab, working as a research assistant for COACH, a community-based intervention to promote healthy eating and lifestyle behaviors among low-income, Latinx families within the Nashville metropolitan area. After graduating from the MHS program, Emily will continue her education at the University of Alabama in the Clinical Health Psychology Doctoral Program. She hopes her research will continue to help amplify voices of individuals who are traditionally marginalized, and challenge barriers which prevent equitable mental health treatment.

Spencer Turney is a master’s candidate in the MHS program, graduating in May 2022. Motivated by the events of COVID-19 and developed through both his professional experience in corporate public relations and undergraduate degree in journalism, his research interests center on the role of the news media in civil society, with specific focus on media consumption and psychology, public health, and risk communication. Using framing theory as a foundational concept, his thesis examines the language and key messages used by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to communicate about the COVID-19 vaccine, the ways in which those messages mutated into news coverage, and how media polarization may have created barriers to effective public health communication. The results of the project shed light on a few of the mechanisms driving a steadily decreasing lack of trust in established experts and institutions. Following the program, Spencer will work as media relations manager for Education Development Center, a nonprofit working to improve education, promote health, and expand economic opportunity across the globe.

SPENCER TURNEY ('22)





2021-22 MHS graduate students and faculty celebrate the end of the semester.

Grace Smith is a graduate of Duke University, where she studied neuroscience with minors in psychology and religion. Grace is grateful to have had opportunities both during and after undergraduate studies to share time and presence with humans, from survivors of genocide in Kigali, Rwanda, to family-caregivers in Washington, D.C., to bereaved middle schoolers in Portland, Me., who challenged her to see pain in its dynamism and healing in wholeness. Thanks to these communities, her passion and interests center on the historico-cultural development of psychiatric diagnoses, particularly the medicalization of pain in mood and stress-related disorders. While in the MA program, she is working with Professor Laura Stark on a thesis examining the development of quantitative measurements for grief between 1975 and 1995. In a critical discourse analysis of articles that focus on “grief,” Smith is particularly interested in exploring the creation of a “grief” that is both definable and able to be quantitatively operationalized, the powers and cultural coloniality involved in forming such discrete definitions/measures, and the motivations for surveilling grief in this way. After the MA program, Grace hopes to continue learning and working toward methods of whole care within and beyond modern psychiatric understandings.

GRACE SMITH ('22)



ASK AN EXPERT

HOW DO YOU MAINTAIN A HEALTHY DIET DURING ISOLATION?

Jamie Pope

VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY'S “ASK THE EXPERT” VIDEO SERIES

Vanderbilt University's [“Ask the Expert”](#) video series features VU faculty sharing their expertise on a range of topics related to COVID-19. In March 2021, to address issues surrounding food security and access to nutrient-dense foods during the pandemic, registered dietitian and MHS assistant professor of practice, Jamie Pope, provided tips on shopping for healthy and affordable foods as well as differentiating between “use by” and “sell by” dates on food labels. Professor Pope was also interviewed for the series early in the pandemic to offer ideas for maintaining a healthy diet during isolation.



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