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MEDICINE Health & Society



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ANNUAL REPORT

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FROM THE CHAIR OF MHS

In “N95”—a song that explores trust and responsibility during the COVID pandemic—Kendrick Lamar provocatively asks, “What community feel / they the only ones relevant?”

The relevance of community is the challenge of our era. We strive to create communities where we feel safe in a world that feels ever less so. And we fight to protect communities threatened by the hierarchies, agendas, and biases powerfully called out by Lamar.

Protecting community also speaks to the challenges and accomplishments of MHS over the past year. In a time of profound social, political, and medical transformation, our remarkable students, staff, and faculty continue to create meaning. Across offices and classrooms, in the face of ongoing reckonings with COVID, race and racism, homophobia, gun violence, and other novel-and not-so-novel pathogens, MHS continues to fortify its community and to provide aid and support to the broader publics of which we are a part. Over the past year, MHS students formed outreach networks and assisted those at risk. Faculty and staff reimagined the power of curriculum and of critical thinking. We grew together through acts of mutual practical, social, and spiritual support.

MHS students and faculty have been at the fore of a number of vital efforts: addressing the structural drivers of racial inequities, advising the Nashville city government about communal safety practices, creating innovative

new formats for teaching, investigating the healthcare of tomorrow, creating pathways for innovative research on gun violence and inequality, and researching illness and health through lenses of history, literature, sociology, disability, gender, geography, and finance. Our overarching commitment to health social justice suffuses our diverse efforts to address health, healthcare, and healthcare solutions in the U.S. and the world. Along the way, our community proved over-and-over again the adage that, if you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.

This is the tenth edition of the MHS newsletter. I particularly wish to thank professors Tara McKay, Ken MacLeish, and Odie Lindsey for their tremendous efforts in crafting and editing the content that appears within these pages.

MHS continues to flourish, producing world-class research, teaching, and community engagement. We boast a growing cohort of top-of-the-field scholars, and expanding, innovative undergraduate and graduate curricula. We now offer over 80 MHS courses, and support over 800 undergraduate majors and a smaller number of minors. Over 200 students graduated with the MHS major in May 2023. 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 global health, health policies and economies, health justice, and medicine, humanities, and the arts. We also support a vibrant and growing master’s degree program in Social Foundations of Health. MA students are embarking on exciting and diverse careers in a variety of fields from medicine to finance to fashion. We also collaborate with a number of other departments to support PhD students.

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

education and curricular innovation.

Over the past year our faculty published important articles and books, won major grants and awards, and appeared on a host of national media outlets. With the added expertise of more than 90 jointly-appointed and affiliated faculty members, the department is truly a trans-institutional cog bridging Vanderbilt’s many 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.” Research scholars from MHS now expand the “structural competency” framework to the study of effective policy solutions to urgent health and political crises such as gun violence. This is but the latest testament to the ways that MHS students and faculty think critically about complex social issues that impact health, health care, and health policy. By teaching students to grapple with these monumental societal questions, MHS is training sophisticated thinkers to be unsatisfied with the status quo—a generation of students prepared to find new solutions to the challenges we face as a nation and as a community. The future feels in many ways uncertain, but I feel great confidence knowing that our students will be leaders of tomorrow showing us 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 continued safety, health, and relevance for our community,

Jonathan Metzger, MD, PhD

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Goodbye Marissa Potts, Katie Ray

This year MHS said goodbye to Administrative Assistant Marissa Potts and Program Specialist Katie Ray. We will miss the cheer, collaboration, and organization they brought to the office, and wish them best of luck.



Welcome Hannah Schaeffer!

Administrative Specialist Hannah Schaeffer grew up in the rural area of Lewistown, Ill. She holds a bachelor's in Strategic Communications from The Ohio State University, a certificate in Social Media Marketing from the University of Delaware, and a certificate in Digital Marketing from Vanderbilt University. Outside of work, Hannah finds her passion and spends her time doing CrossFit and other fitness related activities. Her new role as the Administrative Specialist for the Economics and Medicine, Health, and Society departments consists of helping faculty and staff with classroom AV support, facilities requests, office supplies/equipment, Expense report support, events (all but UG), guest speakers, and websites.

Welcome, Alicia Gavrilis!

Alicia Gavrilis is from central California where she received a degree in Communication Studies, before moving to Madrid to teach English through the Auxiliares de Conversación program. She taught children ages 12–17 and enjoyed the opportunity to work in Spain, learn about its rich culture, and discover her passion for working in education. She is new to the Nashville area and has been thoroughly enjoying it! Outside of work, she is passionate about celebrating her Greek heritage and keeping the traditions of Greek folk dance alive! She is thankful for the opportunity to work at Vanderbilt and support all of the amazing students. Feel free to stop by the MHS office to say hello.



NEWS & AWARDS



Welcome New Faculty Member Julie Ward

Julie Ward joined MHS as Assistant Professor of MHS and Policy in Fall 2023. Her research focuses on opportunities and strategies to equitably improve public health and safety systems for the prevention of violent injury and trauma. Her research has examined injurious shootings by police, public support for firearm policies and public safety reforms, and pandemic-related worker health and safety vulnerabilities. Julie's PhD is in Health and Public Policy from Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. She is also a Registered Nurse with experience in emergency medicine, occupational health, community-based health promotion program management, and nursing education. Outside of work she is a runner, climber, backpacker, and cyclist. Her bikes have names, and she would be happy to introduce you.

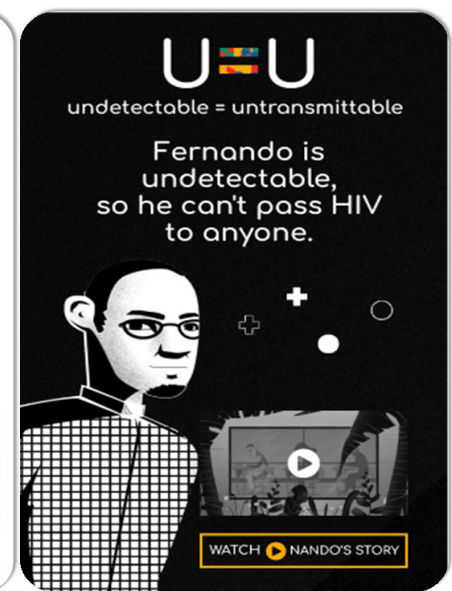
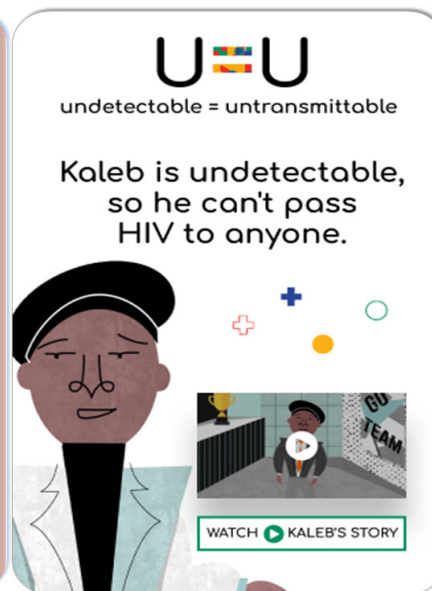
Welcome New Faculty Member Lawrence Stacey

Lawrence Stacey is an incoming Assistant Professor of Sociology, where he will also be affiliated with the LGBTQ+ Policy Lab. Lawrence will graduate with his PhD from The Ohio State University in the summer. His research takes advantage of recent advancements in measurement and data collection on national and state-level surveys to identify LGBTQ+ people, with his broader research agenda focusing on sexuality, gender, health, and family. In his dissertation, Stacey examines the consequences of anti-LGBTQ+ state policies on population health (e.g., nondiscrimination protections, conversion therapy bans), and whether such policies are more harmful for LGBTQ+ populations.



Congratulations to Faculty Member Marcus Dillender

The *American Economic Review* accepted Marcus Dillender's single-authored journal article on the effectiveness of federal funding to combat HIV, and how funding distribution across American cities in the 1990s still impacts the disparate HIV progress various localities made to date. The *American Economic Review* is the highest publication outlet in the profession, with only a handful of the top economists achieving a publication every year.



Congratulations to undergraduate researchers on new publications!

Congratulations to undergraduates Nitya Kari, '24, Isabel Gothelf, '23, Adam Conway, '22, and Judy Min, '22, for their contributions to two recently published academic research articles on LGBTQ+ affirming care led by Professor Tara McKay. The first article, "Association of Affirming Care with Chronic Disease and Preventative Care Outcomes among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Older Adults," published in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, examines the benefits of having an affirming healthcare provider for older LGBTQ+ adults in the U.S. South. The second article, "LGBTQ+ Affirming Care May Increase Knowledge and Support for Undetectable=Untransmittable among Older Gay and Bisexual Men in the U.S. South," published in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, examines the added role of affirming healthcare in HIV prevention and treatment in the U.S. South.

Congratulations to Harry Barbee, Postdoc of the Year



The Postdoc of the Year Award, granted by the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs, recognizes a postdoctoral scholar who demonstrates excellence in research and scholarship, including publications, presentations, awards/honors, service, and mentoring. The 2022 recipient was Harry Barbee, PhD, supervised by Tara McKay, PhD (Medicine, Health, and Society) and colleagues Kitt Carpenter, PhD (Economics) and Gilbert Gonzalez, PhD (Medicine, Health, and Society, Health Policy) in the LGBTQ+ Policy Lab. Barbee's research is making new advancements in aging and medical sociology. Barbee was described as "truly unique ... one of the few sexualities scholars focused on aging." Most notably, their work, which uses population health data to respond to timely policy concerns for transgender youth in the U.S., was recently published by *JAMA Pediatrics*. Barbee is currently funded by an NIH Diversity Supplement, the first-ever Diversity Supplement awarded on the basis of sexual or gender minority status. This has contributed significantly to the culture and conversations about diversity at the NIH. "Few among us can say that we have changed the culture of a government institution through our work, and Harry has been exceptional here," McKay noted. Additionally, Barbee also has become an NIH Butler-Williams Scholar in the past year. In January 2023 Barbee started their first assistant professor position at Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health.

MHS MA Student Finn Shelp-Peck Delivers Grand Rounds

In April 2023 Finn Shelp-Peck gave a grand rounds presentation to the Infectious Disease department at the Vanderbilt University Medical Center titled “Utilizing the Social Determinants of Health to Provide Gender-Affirming Care to Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Populations.” Over 50 clinicians, researchers, and trainees attended. Finn presented the ways that social determinants of health impact the types of care that transgender patients are able to access, the skills to provide gender-affirming care to everyone, and how to provide a safe clinical space for LGBTQ+ individuals. Shelp-Peck incorporated relevant literature and personal experience to create an informative, connected, and thoughtful presentation for clinicians.



Nitya Kari and Elisa Park Win Mitacs Globalink Research Award, Head to Simon Fraser University for Summer

Elisa Park and Nitya Kari, two undergraduate research assistants in the LGBTQ+ Policy Lab, have each been awarded the competitive Mitacs Globalink Research Award. This award will fund Elisa and Nitya to spend summer 2023 at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, BC. Elisa and Nitya will be working with Professor Travis Salway's newly collected Canadian/ U.S. survey data to explore socio-demographic and regional differences in exposure to sexual orientation and gender identity change efforts and health outcomes among LGBTQ+ young people exposed to SOGI conversion practices.

MASTER OF ARTS IN THE SOCIAL FOUNDATIONS OF HEALTH



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is available at vanderbilt.edu/mhs/graduate.
Contact us at mhs-ma@vanderbilt.edu to learn more
about our program and the admissions process.



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Congratulations to Keegan Award Winners in MHS: Joseph Sexton and Catherine Hobbs

Text and images originally published by MyVU on April 17, 2023

Class of 2023 MHS graduates Catherine Hobbs and Joseph Sexton have been named Michael B. Keegan Traveling Fellows for 2023–24. Unique to Vanderbilt, the Keegan Traveling Fellowship aims to enhance the development of future leaders through world travel, research, and experiential learning. The award provides \$25,000 to support their learning and leadership goals as they travel internationally for a year.

The fellowship gives graduating Vanderbilt seniors the opportunity to pursue a topic of scholarly and/or artistic interest in diverse global settings. “The Keegan Traveling Fellowship exemplifies the type of experiential learning and research opportunities that Vanderbilt undergraduates harness while here as students and after graduating,” said Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education Tiffany Tung. “Curiosity, creativity, and an entrepreneurial spirit motivate these students to seek deeply meaningful and transformative experiences that help them see problems and solutions in a new light.”

Hobbs, of Radnor, PA, a double major in Neuroscience and MHS, and minoring in Spanish, plans to visit a broad range of emergency care settings, including rural health centers, urgent care facilities, ambulance bases, and ERs. Hobbs hopes to learn from observation and conversation with local medical care providers to deepen her understanding of beliefs about health and healing in diverse cultural settings. “I am thrilled to have the opportunity to study cultures of health globally,” Hobbs said. “I am hopeful that the people, places, and stories I encounter will lay the foundation for a career in medicine and allow me to better serve my patients with humility and perspective in the future.”

Sexton, of Cumming, GA, will explore the social, political, and historical narratives that shape how people understand mental health. Sexton is a Cornelius Vanderbilt Scholar and triple major in Cognitive Studies, Math, and MHS. He hopes that this experiential opportunity will complement earlier research he has conducted, leveraging machine learning algorithms and other quantitative methods.

“I’ve spent my time at Vanderbilt taking interdisciplinary coursework and learning to unlearn overly biological, chemical, and ‘medicalized’ approaches to mental health,” Sexton said. “The Keegan Fellowship grants me a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to learn firsthand how this resistance happens in other cultures. My travels will radically enhance how I see mental health research, activism, and education as conduits of both healing and harm.”

“This was a highly competitive year, with a record number of applications, and I couldn’t be more thrilled,” said Michael B. Keegan, BA ’80, the alumnus after whom the fellowship was renamed in 2004. “Each is an extraordinary leader.”



Vanderbilt Faculty Discuss America's Struggle for Racial Equality

Caroline Randall Williams is an author, activist, and teacher working in the Department of Medicine, Health, and Society. She was recently named by *Southern Living* magazine as one of 50 people changing the South. This fall, Williams served as a panelist on a faculty panel led by Andre L. Churchwell, Vice Chancellor for Outreach, Inclusion, and Belonging and Chief Diversity Officer, which focused on the state of racial justice in America. At the event Williams described the role of art as a conduit of truth, empathy, and ultimately hope amid uncertain and challenging times.

“What art can do is offer a lens into a more spiritual and moral truth that allows us all to expand our imaginations when we connect with it...which is humanizing and society building,” Williams said. She also contributed to discussions of American identity, moral leadership in government, and how art can move people towards a more just, civil, and moral society. The event was a follow-up

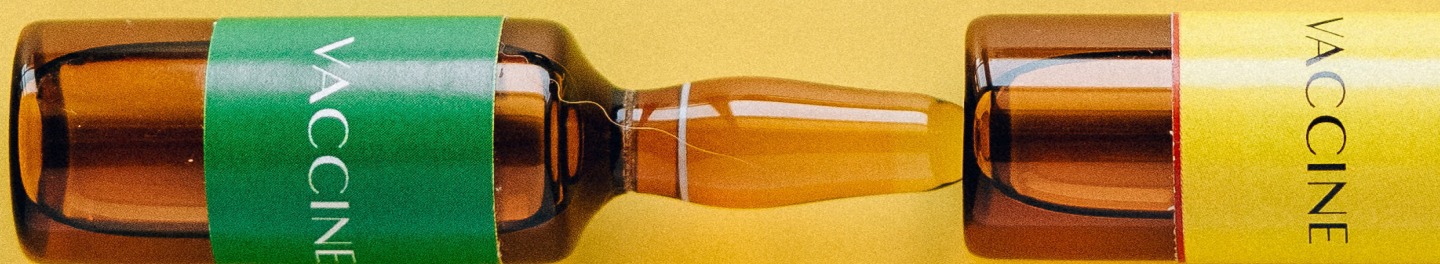
to the Racial Justice, Freedom, and Activism in Nashville and Beyond: Then and Now symposium, which was hosted in March 2021 by the Office for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in partnership with the Chancellor's Lecture Series and the Vanderbilt Project on Unity and American Democracy. The symposium, which examined Nashville's role as an intellectual center of the struggle for racial justice, featured a diverse panel of renowned civil rights and social justice activists, journalists, historians, and scholars.





Labs for Liberation

There are few opportunities for designers such as architects or engineers to work alongside students in the humanities and social sciences. With funding from the Mellon Foundation and working with co-PI Professor Moya Bailey (Northwestern University), Professor Aimi Hamraie will lead a three-year project to foster interdisciplinary collaboration between humanists, social scientists, and designers around the subject of disability. The project will include summer institutes and a year-long fellowship program.



Vaccine Mandates and Paid Sick Leave: Policies for Health

Assistant Professor Katherine Wen has settled into the department and started teaching the economics of health. She studies the impact of public policies, such as vaccine mandates, on health outcomes. She also researches paid sick leave, prescription opioid supply reduction strategies, and the effects of public health insurance expansions. “I’m inspired to engage in research that has the potential to impact health and have real-world implications,” Professor Wen said. “For example, some of my research has looked at the impact of paid sick leave policies on respiratory illnesses such as the flu and COVID. It has been exciting to see how policymakers have referenced our research to inform public policy.”



STUDENT RESEARCH



Discrimination and Distress

In September 2022 Harrison Stuart ('23) presented his research performed under the supervision of Professor Gilbert Gonzales in a poster session at the 2022 Conference of the Interdisciplinary Association for Population Health Science (IAPHS) in Minneapolis, MN. A two-year member of the Gonzales lab and a double major in MHS and Economics, Harrison combined his academic interests by using quantitative methods to estimate the contributions of discrimination and stigma to mental health disparities faced by sexual minorities in his project, titled "Discrimination and Distress: A Oaxaca-Blinder Decomposition of Sexual Minority Mental Health Disparities." At the conference, Harrison had the opportunity to attend lectures on the latest population health research, field questions

about his own work, and visit with leading scholars in the field. Harrison also presented his research at the Vanderbilt Undergraduate Research Fair, where he received the Outstanding Data Science Institute's Summer Research Fellow Presentation Award. In these experiences, Harrison grew as a future physician and public health researcher by connecting with the brightest minds in the field, asking questions of them to develop his own methods, and learning how to present and defend his research.

Building Skills in Research

Two years ago, undergraduate Isabel Gothelf ('23), a double major in MHS and Child Studies, was looking for research experience and started working with Professor McKay in the LGBTQ+ Policy Lab. As a research assistant Gothelf organized background literature on key topics for projects already underway, and contributed to the development of new projects, including a co-authored article in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* titled "LGBTQ+ Affirming Care May Increase Awareness and Understanding of Undetectable = Untransmittable among Midlife and Older Gay and Bisexual Men in the U.S. South" (August 2022). This past academic year, Isabel further explored the connection between HIV criminalization laws, public health trust, and COVID vaccine uptake, as well as climate change and the health of LGBTQ+ populations. She also contributed to the creation of a poster on accelerated biological aging in same-sex couples that won the Best Poster Award at the 2023 Population Association of America annual meeting in Atlanta. Between projects, Isabel helped to research background information on asylum cases for LGBTQ+ individuals from Kenya and Nigeria and develop the wave three survey for VUSNAPS, a multiwave study led by Professor McKay.





HIV Criminalization and Public Health Trust

Nitya Kari is a junior majoring in MHS with a minor in Data Science. After transferring as a sophomore, Nitya began to explore her interest in LGBTQ+ health policy by working with Professor Tara McKay in the LGBTQ+ Policy lab. Nitya has worked on research about HIV-specific criminalization laws in the U.S. and presented at the 2022 International AIDS Conference in Montreal, Canada with Professor McKay. HIV-specific criminalization laws have been shown to negatively affect HIV stigma, disclosure, testing, and overall trust in public health. The study found that in states with HIV criminalization

laws, people living with HIV reported lower trust in public health officials and lower uptake of COVID-19 vaccination compared to states without HIV criminalization laws. Ultimately, these laws hinder efforts to keep communities healthy, as preventing HIV and COVID-19 requires trust in public health measures and practitioners. Nitya explains that presenting at the International AIDS Conference “was an incredibly rewarding experience. I was able to engage with and learn from diverse global voices about current AIDS research and resources.” Through her experiences and knowledge gained from the Conference and LGBTQ+ Policy Lab, Nitya hopes to continue to help efforts to repeal HIV-specific criminalization laws and increase public health trust.

Sleep Quality and Mental Health

Lana Trautman ('23) is a double major in MHS and Korean Studies, conducting original research with Professor Tara McKay and Professor Kristy Clark in the Vanderbilt University Social Networks, Aging, and Policy Study (VUSNAPS) lab. Their research focuses on the role of sleep in explaining health disparities disproportionately affecting members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) community. Sleep is critical for mental and physical health, and recent work has suggested that minority stress—including exposure to violence, discrimination, and stigma—may lead to poorer sleep quality for LGBTQ+ and other minority populations. In a study focusing on older adults, Lana and Professor McKay looked at whether LGBTQ+ identity was associated with poorer sleep quality using data from the UC Berkeley Social Networks Study and VUSNAPS. The study also investigated whether sleep quality was negatively affected by experiences of LGBTQ+-related discrimination. In a second study, Lana and Professor Clark explored the role of sleep duration in explaining mental health disparities among LGBTQ+ adolescents compared to their non-LGBTQ+ peers. Using data from the 2022 Minnesota Student Survey, Lana and Professor Clark investigated whether very short sleep duration significantly explained the association between LGBTQ+ identity and poor mental health outcomes, including depression, anxiety, and past-year suicide ideation and attempt. The study also investigated how parental support affects adolescent sleep duration. Together, these studies suggest whether interventions targeting sleep quality can reduce health disparities for sexual and gender minority populations across the life course.



UNDERGRADUATE HONORS THESES

Maia Regan **Understanding and Improving Care Transitions**

Maia Regan, an MHS major and Chemistry minor, worked with Professor Jessika Boles to complete her Honors thesis, “‘Thrown Out of a Moving Train’: Caregiver Experiences of the Transition from Pediatric Intensive to Acute Care.” The mixed-methods study explores how parents and other caregivers experience caring for severely ill children being treated in hospital settings, and offers recommendations for effective transitions from pediatric intensive to acute care. Maia found that practitioner communication can mitigate distress in a patient’s transition from intensive to acute care, ultimately strengthening the child’s care team in a comprehensive manner that appeals to the physical, psychological, and developmental wellbeing of both the child and their family.





Amanda Kouaho

Questioning the Focus on Maternal Health Literacy

The U.S. maternal healthcare system routinely leads to negative health outcomes for many birthing parents, and policymakers often focus on maternal health literacy (MHL) as a way of mitigating these effects. Amanda Kouaho's Honors thesis set out to analyze whether this focus is merited. She found that contrary to the beliefs that currently dominate in policymaking, changes in MHL do not improve health outcomes independent of social determinants of health, nor does it mitigate structural barriers in the U.S. maternal healthcare system. Rather than investing in MHL, Amanda's thesis recommends that current policy development should focus on addressing the structural factors that create barriers within the U.S. maternal healthcare system. This thesis project was conducted under the supervision of Professor Lucie Kalousová.

Nikol Nikolova

How Race Shapes Experiences of Cancer Genetic Counseling

Nikol Nikolova's dream of becoming a genetic counselor inspired the topic of her Honors research: how race, a well-documented predictor of disparities in cancer diagnosis, treatment access, and outcome, affects patients' experiences of the genetic counseling that can help identify cancer risk. Nikol, an MHS major who also minored in biological sciences and German studies, worked with anthropology Professor Sophie Bjork-James to design a survey that measured patient satisfaction with cancer genetic counseling, and presented her findings at the spring 2023 Vanderbilt Undergraduate Research Fair. Nikol is a member of a sorority, serves as the Vice President of Member Development for the Panhellenic Council, works as a research intern at the Biggs Lab, and also plays club ultimate frisbee.



Cassidy Latchford

Peer Perceptions Shape LGBTQ+ Youth Substance Use



Cassidy Latchford's Honors thesis examines the health consequences of substance use by looking at *injunctive norms*—that is, perceptions that one's friends believe use of a specific substance is wrong. Cassidy's research tests whether this effect might explain higher rates of substance use (alcohol, cigarette, marijuana, prescription drugs, and vape/e-cigarette use) among LGBTQ+ adolescents. Population-based, cross-sectional data from the 2019 Minnesota Student Survey found that compared to cisgender, heterosexual adolescents, sexual and gender minority (SGM) adolescents were at significantly greater odds of using substances, both in general and within the past 30 days, and that they reported significantly lower peer substance use injunctive norms around all substances. These findings suggest that substance use interventions among SGM adolescents must consider peers substance norms if they hope to effectively reduce substance use.

Doah Shin

Empowering Parents Through Social Networks

In the MHS Honors program, Doah Shin worked with Professor Elizabeth Biggs to explore how social support and networks helped empower parents of children with intellectual and developmental disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Doah's research analyzed the nature of family empowerment, characteristics of parents' social networks, and their relationship to one another. She discovered a discrepancy between parents' knowledge of their children's needs and the confidence they felt about adequately supporting their children and reaching out to their social networks for help. Doah is excited to disseminate her findings and is exploring various potential publication venues.



Photo Cedit: Ketut Subiyanto

ON THE MOVE



Learning from Leading Examples of Clinical Care and Psychosocial Support

As part of a yearlong community engagement and speakers series examining interprofessional collaboration and learning, led by Professor Jamie Bruce, MHS graduate students participated in a panel discussion and site tour at Nashville CARES My House clinic. My House clinic and outreach program is an innovative model of coordinated, accessible care, “delivering essential health and support for today’s ever-changing needs of Same Gender Loving (SGL) males.” Through this series, students also visited the Martha O’Bryan Center, the Osher Center for Integrative Health at Vanderbilt, and VUMC’s Firefly Clinic, all of which are recognized as leading examples of interprofessional approaches to clinical care and psychosocial support. Speakers in the classroom included leaders from VUPD, the Center for Biomedical Ethics, VUMC’s Palliative Care team, and the Office of Patient Engagement.

Graduate student Madison Fuller said of the experience, “Many of the sites we have toured are best described as ‘Easter Eggs,’ since one does not know what depth lies in each organization or professional. I took note of how many of the organizations were founded out of personal connections to their cause, by a team carefully woven together and often forging their own path. An unforgettable remark I heard from a team member of Nashville Cares spoke volumes to this: ‘I became what I needed.’”

Karry Su

A Hands-On Approach to Chronic Conditions and Healthcare Costs

Karry Su ('23) is an MHS and Biological Sciences double major with a minor in Data Science. Through her MHS major, she explored different aspects of health and was particularly impacted by coursework in Professor Martha Jones' Economic Demography and Global Health course, and Su's Immersion project on Medicare utilization and chronic condition prevalence. These experiences sparked a curiosity to learn more about the U.S. healthcare system and initiatives aimed at improving patient health nationwide.



In Spring 2023 Karry interned at Lifepoint Health, a healthcare company based in Brentwood, TN. As part of the Population Health team, she learned about healthcare delivery models, value-based care, and accountable care organizations that develop initiatives to prioritize high quality care while also aiming to lower healthcare costs, primarily through managing a patient's chronic conditions. Karry developed skills in healthcare analytics and learned to evaluate performance metrics at skilled nursing facilities and home health agencies. Through this internship, Karry received invaluable guidance from mentors at both Vanderbilt and Lifepoint, and she is eager to apply her newly acquired skills in her future graduate studies and career.





Yulia Pleasant (center) with supervisors at Northwell Health

Yulia Pleasant Streamlining Cancer Treatment, Pleasant Goes from Intern to Professional

In summer 2022, Yulia Pleasant ('23) participated in Northwell Health's Healthcare Management Program, an internship that exposed her to the fields of finance, operations, and project management within hospital administration. The Northwell Health Cancer Institute oversees the organization's many cancer center locations across New York City and Long Island. Yulia was assigned to the health system's cancer care service line, tackled various projects that sought to improve patient experience and maximize the Center's efficiency to accommodate increasing patient volume. Working closely with administrators, physicians, and nurses, Yulia created an improved, flexible system for matching nurses to patients as they arrived for chemotherapy appointments. "It was incredibly gratifying to see this

new system put into action and witness firsthand the seamless appointment flow it offered patients," Yulia said of the internship. "I frequently drew on the knowledge of healthcare systems, laws, and disparities I gained from my MHS major at Vanderbilt." Yulia found that her MHS major provided her with a thorough understanding of the complex economic and social forces that drive the American healthcare system, as well as driving her passion to improve the way that system serves diverse populations across the U.S. "I am so grateful to the MHS program at Vanderbilt for preparing me to start my career with a holistic understanding of the healthcare industry!" Yulia begins a full-time role in healthcare management at Northwell Health after graduation.

Love for Health Education Sends CV Scholar Suman Mohanty to India

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Cornelius Vanderbilt Scholar Suman Mohanty (BA '25), spent her winter break doing something she's always dreamed of: supporting a community she loves through teaching and medicine. Mohanty, a second year MHS and Child Development double major and Spanish minor, traveled to the Dr. Isac Santra Balniketan Child Care Institution, an orphanage in Sambalpur, India, to teach children about health and hygiene. Mohanty created the immersive/independent project herself, using her Cornelius Vanderbilt scholarship stipend to pay for the trip. "This trip is always something I've wanted to do because I'm super invested in health equity," Mohanty said. "As an aspiring pediatrician and global health researcher, I find it critical to devote my time and energy toward advancing health education, healthcare access, and healthcare in general."

Mohanty spoke to the children in Odia, the principal language of the state of Odisha, where the orphanage is located. She learned Odia as a young child from her grandmother. (Children referred to her as "Suman nani," which means elder sister in Odia.) The orphanage is home to nearly 80 children ranging in ages from three to 18. Mohanty taught two lessons each day, and also had the opportunity to play with the children and learn their traditional games. Mohanty was able to provide essential medical supplies and toys to the orphanage through money she's earned by working as a medical researcher.



Much of what she taught the children revolved around the proper use of the supplies and good hygiene. "Several kids came up to me and showed me the injuries they had," Mohanty said. "One of my young students even brought his friends to me, asking about the ointments and bandages, as he knew his friends had severe rashes that needed to be taken care of. These moments really highlighted the importance of health education. They just needed to know what they're supposed to do if they're sick or hurt so they could seek out help and get better."

Back at Vanderbilt, Mohanty is deeply invested in her community: she conducts research on Down Syndrome and other developmental disabilities; serves as the president-elect of Health, Education, Advocacy, and Leadership VU (HEAL VU); is vice president of Vandy UNICEF; is a founding board member and treasurer of the Vandy American Medical Student Association (AMSA); serves as the membership program director of the College Scholars Council; and is the community building chair of Vandy Partners in Health Engage. Through HEAL VU, she organizes fundraisers to support the orphanage, where she hopes to return. In the meantime, technology is helping her keep in touch with the children. "I'm able to message and video chat with the kids often," Mohanty said. "I talk to them about how their days are going and what they're learning in school. I was able to show them my college dorm and they asked to virtually meet some of my friends, so that was fun. It's just like having a bunch more awesome younger siblings."



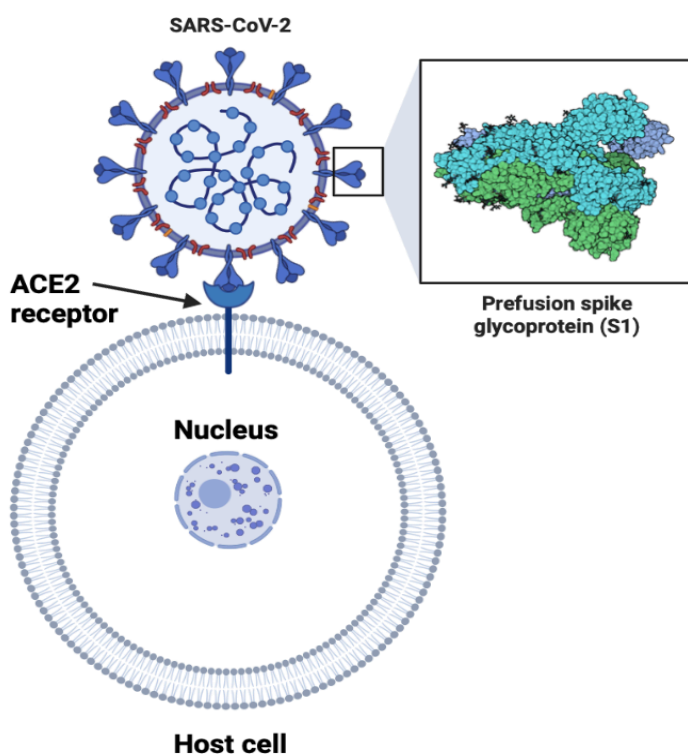
Athira Sivadas

Finding Ways to Make a Difference in a Pandemic

One of the most difficult things about the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic was that it could be hard to know what to do in the face of the many urgent problems that came with it. Athira Sivadas, a graduating senior who will be attending Vanderbilt University School of Medicine in the fall, said that it was thanks not just to her biological sciences expertise, but her wide-ranging MHS coursework, that she knew how she could make a difference. Confusion about the virus itself, PPE shortages, healthcare worker burnout, the compounding effects of inequality on some of COVID's most vulnerable victims, and the isolation of chronically ill and immunocompromised patients all stood out as health problems in themselves, Athira thought, and they were rooted in social and structural factors. An avid volunteer service leader, Athira spent the last couple of years tackling many of these issues head-on. As a member of the American Red Cross at Vanderbilt, she organized a school-wide mask-making event that donated masks to Vanderbilt University Medical Center, as well as serving as a family disaster relief caseworker. As Co-Founder and Co-President of Katie's Art Project at Vanderbilt, Athira provided arts and crafts activities for pediatric patients at the Tri-Star Centennial Children's Hospital, and as a Student Advocate for Public Health, she designed and disseminated an infographic that explains how SARS-CoV-2 enters human cells and how COVID vaccines prevent this, using her expertise on protein interactions from her work in the Plate Lab to provide an accessible explanation of viral function.



HOW DOES SARS-CoV-2 ENTER YOUR CELLS?



How does SARS-CoV-2 enter your cells?

SARS-CoV-2 contains spike proteins on its exterior that bind to ACE2 receptors on the membrane of your cells. This causes your cells to take up the virus.

What is the ACE2 receptor?

ACE2 stands for angiotensin-converting enzyme. It is expressed in many organs, including the lungs, small intestine, etc. It modifies the angiotensin protein, which helps raise blood pressure.

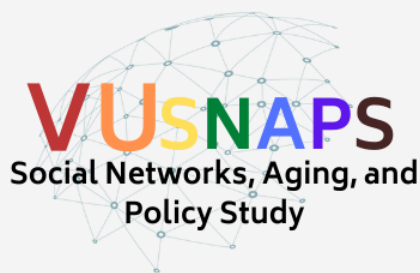
How does this relate to the vaccine?

Most COVID-19 vaccines cause host cells to produce ONLY the spike protein, which triggers an immune response in your body that helps protect you against the virus.

First-ever Longitudinal Study on LGBTQ+ Aging is Window into Seldom-Studied Community

Original text and images published by MyVU on June 20, 2022

AGING MATTERS



A four-year longitudinal study of older LGBTQ+ people in the U.S. South is being conducted to better identify the sources of stress and resilience for this infrequently studied population. Led by Tara McKay, assistant professor of MHS and her team, the Vanderbilt University Social Networks, Aging, and Policy Study (VUSNAPS) is providing the first data of its kind, which policy makers are already using to better reach the community and help them cope during the COVID-19 pandemic.

McKay and VUSNAPS were recently featured in an *Aging Matters* episode on Nashville Public Television. Watch the episode for more on the unique social, economic, and health challenges LGBTQ+ older adults face in Nashville and beyond. “At the time, the mayor’s office was looking to make sure that lots of different groups weren’t excluded from the (COVID-19) response,” McKay said.

In addition to COVID impacts, wave one explored healthcare disparities within the community. A soon-to-be-published paper details how access to an LGBTQ+-affirming healthcare provider

leads to improved management of mental health, greater participation in preventative health screenings, and lower levels of cognitive impairment among older LGBTQ+ adults. “Having a healthcare provider that you view as LGBTQ+-affirming actually shapes your healthcare experience,” McKay said. “We know that this age group is hesitant to go to see a doctor. They have either personally experienced or have heard about other people’s experiences of discrimination from providers. This, on average, keeps them home longer with an illness before they seek help—making the situation worse. We were really surprised at the health improvements achieved just by having a provider that you were out to and who was affirming.”





The initial three-wave VUSNAPS study, which is funded by the National Institutes of Health, has spawned a separate BioAge study which will analyze the connection between biological aging and the aging experiences reported through the surveys. “We’re looking not only at how your self-reported health is changing or linked to other factors, but also how your DNA and systems are actually aging in response to stress or other life events,” McKay said.

The information gathered from VUSNAPS will ultimately be publicly available via a database for other researchers to use in their own work. Already, researchers from the University of Colorado-Denver, UCLA, and Israel have expressed interest in having access to the data for study. “There’s a lot of interest and we have a ton of momentum,” McKay said. “There isn’t anything else like this out there.”

Numerous factors make VUSNAPS exceptional and desired. Most current LGBTQ+ community research that exists only surveys people once, whereas McKay’s work

revisits the same population three times over the span of four years, providing a better snapshot of how people’s situations evolve over time. Also, the majority of existing LGBTQ+ research focuses on younger people, which doesn’t represent the whole community.

“There’s almost no information on aging in this community,” McKay said. “This knowledge is important because we know there are actually a lot of health disparities at an earlier age, but we need to see what happens to those disparities over time, in multiple dimensions. Do they compound, or do people find a way to thrive anyway? How are people responding to some of these issues in their lives? How do they cope with them and build a life? That’s what we’re looking at here.”

Additionally, VUSNAPS gives a unique look at the social networks of LGBTQ+ people, which can be very different from the heterosexual community. Because they tend to have fewer family members but more friends in their network, there are implications as they get older and need support.

McKay said her group plans to use the data gathered for future study on LGBTQ+ social networks and other topics, including the effects of discrimination on sleep quality, and political engagement and activism later in life.

The project has also provided an opportunity for many students to participate and engage in topics important to them. “We have a lot of students involved in this, and folks have connected with it,” McKay said. “It’s clearly important to students who share some of these identities, but also to students who really just want to work on something that matters and has a social justice component. It can be something they care about.”



Beyond Tragedy: Responding to the Public Health Crisis of Mass Shootings

by Bhalika Rajan

“Covenant Strong” is the phrase that rang through social media as a response to the March 2023 mass shooting at the Covenant School in Nashville. Community outpouring reflects the sentiment that the event was a tragedy, that the loss of life was unjust, and that this is a terrifying history which should never be repeated.

As a Vanderbilt senior, I’m guilt-ridden that mine was a normal day, while next door at Vanderbilt University Medical Center the victims struggled for their very lives. As an MHS student, it’s incredibly dissonant to receive education on the importance of determined, unified, and widespread action on public health issues while we live in a state where the horror of a violent shooting—152 rounds were fired in school full of children and educators—is met with legislators’ “thoughts and prayers.”

The epidemic of gun violence in America produces an incredible number of entirely preventable deaths. I, like many others, am motivated to speak out and continue to protest current gun policies. As of March there had been more mass shootings and mass shooting victims in 2023 than there were days of the year til that point (Gun Violence Archive). As just one student, it’s easy to feel powerless, yet I’m grateful to witness and participate in the cohesive, dramatic, and persistent protest efforts which Vanderbilt, greater Nashville, and national communities have led to enact positive change on the issue.



CREATIVE ARTS AND WELLBEING

Dreams Through Shadow and Light and a Future in Healthcare Meet Pedro Rosales-Diaz '25

Pedro Rosales-Diaz ('25) is working toward majors in MHS and Latina and Latino Studies and minors in Biological Sciences and French. Rosales-Diaz published a poetry collection and is currently working on a second collection.

Q. Tell us about your book, *Dreams Through Shadow and Light*

A. *Dreams Through Shadow and Light* resembles a journey through my life up until now. It is divided into three sections: Shadow, Glow, and Light. Shadow explores the dark and somber aspects of my childhood and begins to question the ideas I once believed through the factors of society. The collection continues with Glow, where I honor and give an ode to the people and places that helped me become the person I am today. The collection ends with Light, where the poems shift slowly away from me and focus on love for the future. As this section is not about me, it shows not only that the journey of love is not over yet, but also the last poem, "Reflections," offers a conclusion of self-love and pride that I was able to gain through my childhood and adolescence.

Q. Why was it important for you to create this book?

A. It was important for me to write this book for two reasons. One was for increasing the Latinx representation within the literary world, especially through poetry. As I fell in love with poetry last year, finding poets that can relate to you is difficult, which can feel isolating. Writing this collection was a way to mention some of the trials and tribulations I have overcome, but also it can be a place for someone to read it and relate to it. It is important for everyone to feel included and seen. Another was for personal closure. Writing this was a sense of therapy, where I can put my anger into words and stanza, and by the end of it, I can feel calm and tranquil.

Q. Are you working on anything currently?

A. Yes I am! I am in the works on my second collection! It will be called *Sanctuary of Love*. I have ideas on what the major sections will be, but right now I'm writing away when a thought comes to mind!



Q. What will be your independent project for Immersion?

A. My independent project for Immersion will be poetry! *Dreams Through Shadow and Light* was my first, self-published collection, so the end project will be to have three collections that act as a trilogy of my life. By the end of this project, I hope to have a box set published through Vanderbilt Press, so future students and faculty can have the chance to read them.

Q. Are you thinking of future plans?

A. I am currently thinking of applying for the MHS 4+1 MA program and going on to nursing school to become a nurse practitioner.

Q. What advice would you give to students who want to become published?

A. Just write and do it! I never thought I would publish my own work until I just kept writing poems. Poetry is a fluid art that one can create and redesign with one's experiences, passions, and upbringings, and it is important to share them. You never know who you can relate to if you don't write about how you feel or what has happened in your life!



Professor Gonzales and MHS 1001 students at the Tennessee Performing Arts Center (TPAC) to view *The Prom*.

Immersion at the Intersection of Policy, Wellbeing, and the Arts: MHS 1001 Goes to *The Prom*

Professor Gilbert Gonzales provided new learning opportunities for first-year students in Spring 2022 to connect the dots between policy, politics, and public health. In MHS 1001 Rights, Health & Wellness, first year students met weekly to discuss how public discourse and policy impacts the health and wellness of vulnerable communities, families, and individuals. The course featured an off-campus immersive experience to watch the Broadway musical show *The Prom* at the Tennessee Performing Arts Center (TPAC)

in Nashville. The musical follows four Broadway actors reminiscing about their bygone days of fame as they travel to Indiana to help a student who was banned from bringing their girlfriend to the high school prom. Other immersive experiences included faculty and postdoctoral guest speakers from across the university to share their expertise and experiences researching health inequities at the intersections of public health, public policy, civil rights, and creative expression.

Teaching and Research on LGBTQ+ Health Equity Converge



In Professor Kirsty Clark's 2022 LGBTQ Health Disparities class, students engaged in evidence-based discussions about risk and protective factors of LGBTQ+ health and read memoirs written by LGBTQ+ people. They also got to work outside the classroom, meeting with local Nashville community leaders in LGBTQ+ health, and attending *The Cake*, a humorous and poignant play that addressed many class themes at the Tennessee Performing Arts Center. MHS students took the class during a time of historically high anti-LGBTQ+ legislation in Tennessee and around the country, which motivated critical, in-class discussions about the roles of politics and policy in LGBTQ+ health disparities.

In addition to teaching LGBTQ+ Health Disparities, Professor Clark and her lab worked on several research projects related to LGBTQ+ population mental health. In April, three members of the Clark Lab, including MHS undergraduates Joseph Sexton and Elisa Park, attended the Society for Research in Adolescence Conference in San Diego to present their ongoing research on LGBTQ+ mental health. Research from the Clark Lab was published in several high-impact journals over the 2022–23 academic year, including *Pediatrics* and *Archives of Suicide Research*. As faculty in MHS and an Associate Director of the Vanderbilt LGBTQ+ Policy Lab, Professor Clark is excited to continue working towards mental health equity for LGBTQ+ individuals in Tennessee and the broader U.S. South.

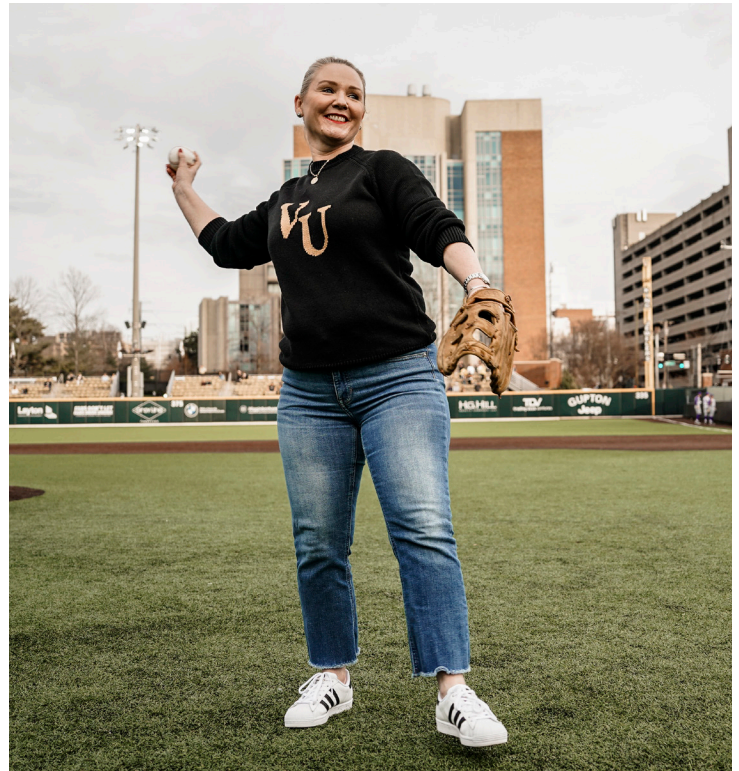


Making Health Professions and Campus Life Accessible

In Fall of 2022, Professor Jaime Bruce joined the MHS department as a senior lecturer, teaching courses on mental health in adolescence and building resiliency in families experiencing chronic stress. She has continued her special interest in interprofessional approaches to healthcare provision and collaborated with clinicians and community agencies to educate students on innovative care models. As part of her course on this topic, Professor Bruce developed a community engagement and speakers series allowing students to participate in presentations,

panel discussions, and site visits with professionals from a variety of settings. Students visited Nashville CARES' My House clinic, the Martha O'Bryan Center, VUMC's Firefly Clinic, and the OSHER Center for Integrative Health. The series also brought in speakers from VUPD, the Center for Biomedical Ethics, VUMC's Palliative Care team, and the Office of Patient Engagement.

Professor Bruce is strongly committed to advising and mentoring students during their transition to college and throughout their time on the Vanderbilt campus. She serves as faculty advisor to the university's American Red Cross chapter and will be supporting incoming students as a VUceptor in the Vanderbilt Visions program in Fall 2023. She was honored to throw the Faculty First Pitch at the VandyBoys opening home game this spring.





Soldiers wait in line for health screening after deploying to Iraq at the Fort Hood Soldier Readiness Processing Site in 2011. US Army photo.

The Costs of 20 Years of War in Iraq

March 2023 marked the 20-year anniversary of the U.S.-led invasion and occupation of Iraq, a war that has remained relatively remote from the experience of most Americans but that has exacted a massive human and financial toll. Associate Professor of MHS and Anthropology Ken MacLeish was one of the invited participants in The Iraq War: A 20-Year Retrospective Symposium, hosted by the National Infantry Museum and Columbus State University in Columbus, GA. The event brought together senior military officials involved in planning and leading the war, U.S. servicemembers who participated in it, Iraqis who experienced the war as civilians and exiles, and researchers on topics ranging from the effects of war-making on American society to war's devastating and ongoing impacts on Iraq and the Iraqi people. Speaking about his research as part of a panel on veteran wellbeing and mental health, MacLeish noted, "It's important not to let medical labels narrow our sense of war's consequences. The problems confronting U.S. veterans, for instance, aren't just matters of individual suffering and disability, but the products of policy choices about whether and how the U.S. goes to war." The health consequences of the Iraq War have been massive: most Americans are aware of the 4,431 U.S. servicemembers who died there, but they may not know that over a million of those who served experienced service-connected illness and injury. In Iraq, over 300,000 civilians were killed. Millions more were displaced from their homes or found themselves struggling to survive amidst infrastructure and a health system devastated by war. "Health, illness, injury, and disability are the terms we use to understand the human toll of war," MacLeish observed, "but this lens can limit our understanding of war when it doesn't include the full range of experiences and people affected by it."

The Promise of Treatment Over Jail

A key strand of Professor Panka Bencsik's work as an economist sits at the intersection of health behaviors and the criminal justice system, exploring potential solutions to mitigate the opioid crisis. In collaboration with local public agencies and colleagues at the University of Chicago Crime Lab, she studies the nation's largest law enforcement-led drug diversion program, Chicago's Narcotics Arrest Diversion Program (NADP). As part of this program, people arrested with small amounts of illicit substances, such as heroin and its derivatives, meet a substance use treatment provider and are released without ever being charged, rather than going through the traditional criminal justice system.



Professor Bencsik finds that those eligible for the diversion program exhibit a range of characteristics that make them fitting candidates for substance use treatment. Nearly 70 percent of participants are daily heroin users, a third have overdosed before, and a fifth have never tried treatment before. The average age of a program participant is mid-40s—exactly the age when Chicagoans are at the highest risk of dying of an overdose. Drug arrestees eligible for diversion are significantly less likely to be rearrested for a crime. Lastly, the study shows that drug diversion programs are able to reach many more drug users at a substantially lower cost for the state than drug courts.





Aging and End-of-Life Preparation among Transgender Older Americans

by Nik Lampe, PhD, LGBTQ+ Policy Lab

A “good death”—a set of conditions during the dying process that allows an individual to gain awareness, acceptance, and preparation for death (e.g., dying at home)—has in recent years captured the attention of researchers, clinicians, and policymakers. While scholars have examined dominant, good death definitions among underserved communities in healthcare, limited research uncovers how structural inequities reproduce uncertainty in perceiving, preparing for, and experiencing death. Utilizing data from 47 semi-structured individual interviews with transgender older Americans (65 years and over), I examined how trans older adults perceive and plan for aging and end-of-life care experiences through advance care planning. My analysis revealed transgender older adults’ uncertainties around their ability to experience a good death, along with their resourceful strategies for reducing the possibility of a bad death. Two primary fears motivated uncertainty around having a good death: (i) medical mistreatment and neglect in aged care settings, and (ii) lack of social support. Because interview respondents have a great deal of uncertainty around whether they will be able to have a good death, they reported engaging in resourceful strategies that might prevent them from experiencing a bad death: (i) formalizing advance care planning documents and (ii) selecting healthcare agents. While many trans older adults must navigate uncertainty in a good death due to structural inequities, they simultaneously engage in resourceful strategies to better ensure their ability to avoid a bad death by drawing upon existing and available social support and resources.



MHS HOT TOPICS SERIES CONFRONTS THE COVID PANDEMIC

Viral Politics with Professor Steven Thrasher

“When we follow any virus, we follow the fault lines of our culture,” Professor Steven Thrasher writes in his widely acclaimed 2022 book *The Viral Underclass: The Human Toll When Inequality and Disease Collide*. Thrasher, the Daniel H. Renberg Chair of Journalism at Northwestern University, visited Vanderbilt in November 2022 to discuss his groundbreaking work. In a public lecture hosted by MHS’s Hot Topics series and supported by the Departments of Sociology, Communication, and Gender and Sexuality Studies, and the Vanderbilt LGBTQ+ Policy Lab, Thrasher explained his argument this way: “Viruses don’t discriminate, but their effects do discriminate against the bodies of the underclass, because they have been placed in proximity to danger by the structural design of powerful humans.” Drawing on a long career covering the intersection of LGBTQ+ health with economic inequality, racism, and policing, Thrasher placed the COVID-19 pandemic in the context of other viral infections, like HIV/AIDS, Monkeypox, and previous generations of flu and respiratory viruses, that have conspicuously followed the fault lines of American inequality. Thrasher explained how, paradoxically, the burdens of infectious disease are multiplied by the stigmas and structural barriers already imposed on people marginalized by their race, sexuality, disability, or immigration status. For instance, making health insurance the primary payment mechanism for COVID testing, prevention, vaccination, and treatment means that COVID’s consequences for the uninsured are far worse for the marginalized but that much harder to see for those with relatively privileged access to drugs and healthcare. The solution, Thrasher argued, is to prioritize interventions tailored for those who are most vulnerable, and to keep some of the emergency infrastructure deployed for COVID—things like free testing and free vaccination—permanently in place, focusing them on specifically vulnerable populations, and expanding them to address barriers like the very high cost of antiretroviral drugs to manage HIV.

During his visit, Thrasher also stopped by Professor Ken MacLeish’s Politics of Health class, where he shared the career trajectory that took him from staff writer at *Saturday Night Live*, to reporter at *The Village Voice*, to academic researcher and advocate, and answered students’ questions about the role of health research and future medical professionals in addressing viral inequalities. At his public lecture, he was joined by professors Jeff Bennett (Department of Communication Studies), Jen Gaddy, and Cristian Chandler (both VUMC Department of Infectious Disease), who commented on the importance of Thrasher’s work for understanding urgent viral inequalities confronting elderly, disabled, and incarcerated people, and racial and sexual minorities in Tennessee.



Doctors Write the Pandemic

In September 2022, the Hot Topics in Medicine, Health, and Society lecture series focused on physician-authors who wrote about their life-changing experiences treating patients, working, researching, and writing during the COVID-19 pandemic. Speakers included Alex Jahangir, an orthopedic trauma surgeon and a professor in the Department of Orthopedic Surgery at Vanderbilt University Medical Center. Dr. Jahangir was named chair of the Metropolitan Nashville Coronavirus Taskforce at the onset of the pandemic in March 2020 by Mayor John Cooper. He remained in this role for the entire two years of the task force. Dr. Jahangir led Nashville's pandemic response, developing and implementing policies that mitigated the spread of disease, bringing stakeholders across the city together, spearheading access to testing and vaccination for vulnerable communities, and serving as the public's primary source of information about the city's massive effort to keep residents safe. He detailed his experiences in the award-winning book, *Hot Spot: A Doctor's Diary From the Pandemic*, from which he read at the panel. Also featured was E. Wesley Ely, a critical care pulmonologist and a professor of Medicine at Vanderbilt University Medical Center. Dr. Ely cares for patients with critical illness in the intensive care unit. His research interests focus on the psychological, cognitive, and functional consequences of delirium and its intersection with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias. Dr. Ely discussed his outstanding memoir, *Every Deep-Drawn Breath: A Critical Care Doctor on Healing, Recovery, and Transforming Medicine in the ICU*, which describes his mission to prevent ICU patients from being harmed by the technology that keeps them alive.



The packed-lecture-hall panel was hosted and moderated by MHS Chair Jonathan Metzl. Respondents and discussants included MHS professors Caroline Randall-Williams and Celina Calahan-Kapoor, and former Nashville mayor Bill Purcell. An extended student-led Q-and-A followed the presentations.



"Who does the work of science?"

Lessons for Present Inequalities from a History of NIH Research

Professor Laura Stark was selected by the History of Science Society to deliver the 2023 Sarton Lecture to the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Stark's March 4 address in Washington, D.C., was titled "Who does the work of science: science as passion, punishment, and paycheck." The lecture analyzed how the COVID-19 pandemic laid bare society's reliance on dense layers of workers, in science and service industries alike. The pandemic also exposed economic and racial injustices in the mismatch between workers' socially necessary products and services and their compensation, safety, and job stability.



Over the past century, the political and economic structures that promoted and capitalized on science labor done behind the headlines have changed dramatically. Based on her current research, Stark reported on changes at the U.S. National Institutes of Health, focusing on the people who served as healthy human subjects of scientific experiments. At NIH's main campus in Bethesda, MD., thousands of Americans since the 1950s have been paid to live for days, months, or years as "normal control research subjects" in scientists' studies. In their free hours, the so-called "Normals" work in unwaged "career assignments" as an informal science labor force of lab technicians, data collectors, care providers, and more. This unpaid work serves a variety of shifting purposes for the Normals, the scientists, and NIH leadership. Told through more than 100 oral histories with former Normals and NIH scientists, Stark's research exposes changes in economic and political structures of science and American life in a global century. Often surprising, funny, and brave, these lives point to inequities in work as well as to creative possibilities in the present day for science in the name of justice.

The George Sarton Memorial Lecture in the History and Philosophy of Science, begun in 1960, is given annually at the American Association for the Advancement of Science meeting. Around 150 members of the AAAS attended the lecture.

Collaborating to Find the Forces that Shape Dementia

Professor Lucie Kalousová continues to develop her new line of research on disparities in cognitive outcomes among older adults. In a new set of studies with undergraduates Matthew Anguiano and Sophie Goldenberg, supported by the Alzheimer's Association, Professor Kalousová has investigated how public policies affect the distribution of Alzheimer's disease and other dementias in the U.S. population. In related collaborative work with undergraduate Brina Ratangee, Professor Kalousová studied the well-being of family members and friends who care for dementia patients and how it may have been affected by state policies

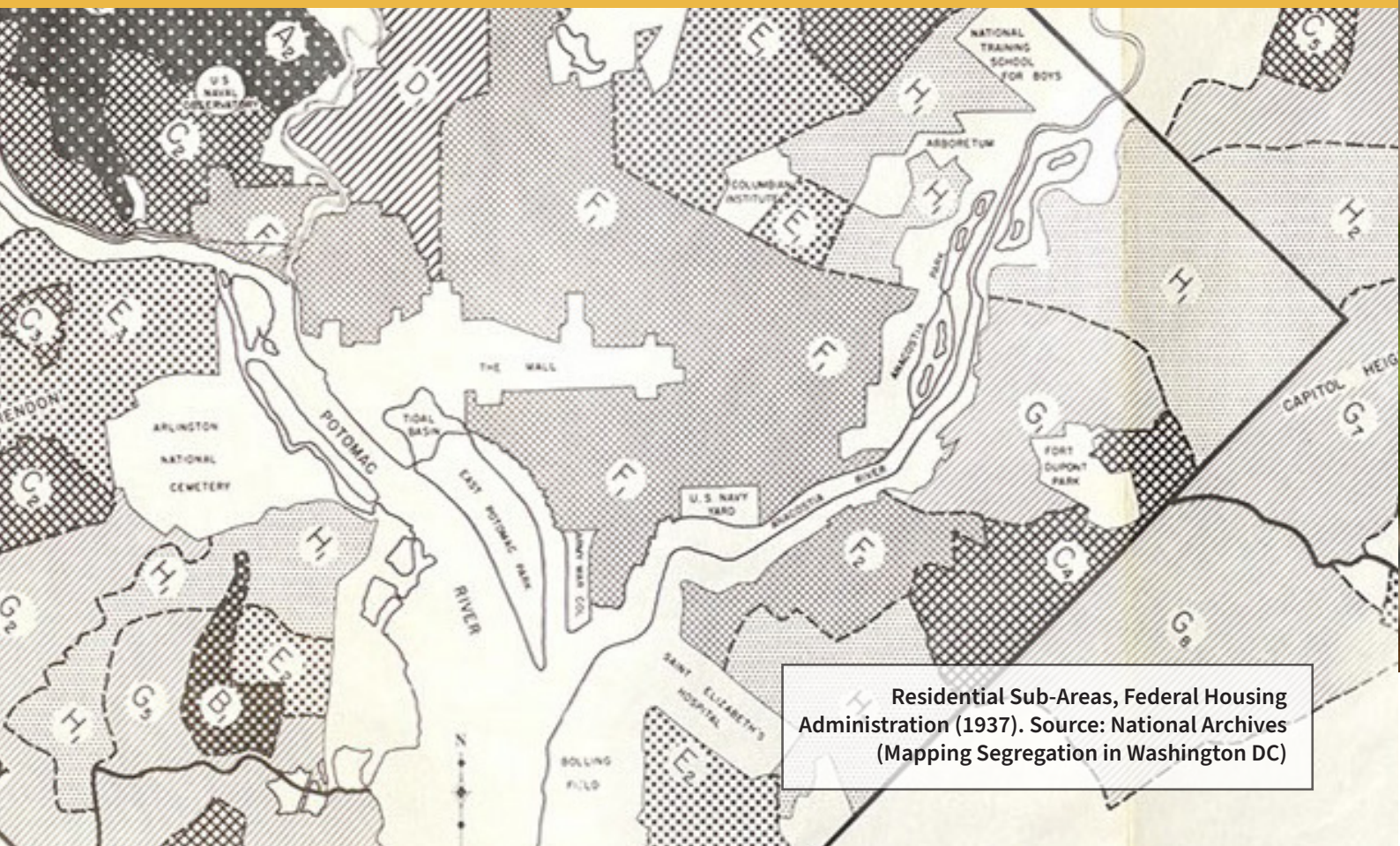


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during the COVID-19 pandemic. Professor Kalousová also continues to pursue her research on the lifetime consequences of negative health exposures in childhood. Some of this work was recently published in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*. To extend her cross-disciplinary collaborations beyond Vanderbilt's campus, Professor Kalousová has been invited to become an external affiliate of the Population Studies Center at the University of Michigan and the Population Research Institute at Penn State, and she will be visiting both institutions regularly in the coming years to forge shared research projects with local faculty.



MHS HOSTS INFLUENTIAL VOICES IN HEALTH AND HEALTHCARE



The Power of Place in Shaping Illness and Health

In March 2023, Sanyu Majola, Professor of Sociology at Princeton University, visited MHS to present the MHS Spring Colloquium. Her talk, “The Power of Place in Shaping Illness and Health,” took colloquium participants on a journey from South Africa to Washington, D.C., to examine the historical, social, financial, and structural determinants of the racial health disparities we observe in those areas today. Afterwards, Professor Majola joined several MHS graduate students for lunch to hear how they were using their master’s theses and practicums to deepen their understanding of health disparities.





The “Individual Mandate” and the Health Consequences of Privatizing COVID Response

In October 2022, MHS hosted a virtual visit by Abdullah Shihpar, a nationally-renowned journalist and head of the People, Place, and Health Collective at the Brown University School of Public Health. The economic effects of the pandemic have received a lot of attention, but Shihpar, a public health scholar, offered a critical review of some of the ways that relying on market-driven or private sector responses can undermine public health. “It’s easy to forget that most transmission happens in the workplace,” Shihpar noted. Disproportionate COVID infection risk is borne not only by healthcare workers, who are more likely to have access to testing and protective equipment, but also by workers in settings like meat packing plants and commercial kitchens. Throughout the pandemic, workers in many sectors faced the prospect of being fired if they chose to stay home from jobs where they ran the risk of getting sick or infecting others, and large corporations lobbied the Centers for Disease Control to relax COVID protections like the recommended 10-day isolation period for infected people. What many of these dynamics have in common, Shihpar showed, is placing responsibility on individual workers to manage their health in situations that they can’t control. He also laid out an alternative vision for how to make pandemic life, now or in the future, safer for everyone. “A good rule, I think, is ‘we will come to you to keep you healthy,’” he said, citing mandatory paid leave and universal healthcare as straightforward policy mechanisms that could dramatically change the landscape of health in the face of mass infection.



Living Under the Rainbow: Lesbian and Gay Parenting Today

Dr. Charlotte Patterson, Professor of Psychology at University of Virginia, presented a campus-wide talk: “Living Under the Rainbow: Lesbian and Gay Parenting Today.” Dr. Patterson is a renowned psychologist and world-leading expert on LGBTQ+ parenting. Co-sponsored by the Vanderbilt LGBTQ+ Policy Lab and Department of Psychology and Human Development, this talk highlighted decades of research showing that children raised by LGBTQ+ parents fare just as well—psychologically and intellectually—as children raised by heterosexual parents. Dr. Patterson

emphasized that this finding remains consistent regardless of external factors across studies. Dr. Patterson’s talk was attended by over 150 Vanderbilt community members, including students across schools and departments as well as healthcare professionals from Vanderbilt University Medical Center. Chancellor Diermeier also attended Dr. Patterson’s talk, demonstrating Vanderbilt’s commitment to amplifying research on LGBTQ+ health and wellbeing.



Remote Access Archive, Society of Disabled Oracles

Remote Access Archive

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many people began learning, working, and socializing using remote technologies, such as Zoom. Remote participation was particularly significant for disabled communities, however, even before the pandemic. With funding from the National Science Foundation, Professor Aimi Hamraie's Critical Design Lab is collecting data for the Remote Access Archive project. An international team of research assistants and community scholars is collecting data for a public, digital archive of the ways that disabled communities have used technology for remote forms of participation, before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The archive will include oral histories, photographs, Twitter threads, internet discussion boards and listservs, telephone trees, telegrams, quilts, radio transcripts, screenshots, and other forms of documentation. These forms of documentation will show the innovations in remote participation that have been part of disability history and continue to be significant for the many people acquiring disabilities, such as Long COVID.



Society of Disabled Oracles

With disability media expert and activist Alice Wong and disabled graphic designer Jen White-Johnson, Professor Hamraie is working on the Society for Disabled Oracles, an art-research project focused on disability as a knowledge base for surviving major crises such as the pandemic. The project combines symbols, stories, and crowdsourced contributions to offer a living chorus and archive of disabled experiences.

How Prior Authorization Requirements Affect Use of Tobacco Cessation Medication

Professor Marcus Dillender has received a grant from the National Cancer Institute to study how requiring doctors to obtain prior authorization affected Medicaid enrollees' use of tobacco cessation medications. Professor Dillender's preliminary findings suggest that, despite prior authorization being relatively easy to obtain, requiring doctors to obtain approval from program administrators reduced prescriptions of tobacco cessation medications filled by Medicaid enrollees by approximately 50 percent. This finding is relevant for understanding socioeconomic disparities in the use of tobacco cessation medications in the U.S., since over two-thirds of state Medicaid programs require doctors to obtain prior authorization before prescribing tobacco cessation medications to Medicaid enrollees as of 2022. Professor Dillender's future research will continue to assess the role of prior authorization requirements in Medicaid programs on Medicaid enrollees' access to health care.

GRADUATE STUDENTS



Exposing MHS Graduate Students to Research Applications

MHS graduate training connects students to faculty research in many, many ways, demonstrating how real-world problems become research questions, showing how similar problems can be approached from different disciplinary perspectives, and modeling presentation formats, from works-in-progress to job interview presentations. As part of the MHS Master's program spring 2023 Chair's Seminar, professors Ken MacLeish and Panka Bencsik shared their research on the intersection of mental health and the criminal justice system with MA students. "We want students to see what research looks like in action: how you do it and analyze it, but also how you present, talk about, and respond to it as a professional skill," said MHS chair Jonathan Metzl. MacLeish's presentation drew on ethnographic research with veteran criminal offenders and addressed the ways that military veterans are both singled out for special treatment in the legal, medical, and state welfare systems and imagined as uniquely damaged and dangerous compared to civilians. Bencsik described quantitative policy research that discovered that a Chicago Police Department program connecting drug users with non-mandatory treatment instead of arresting them reduced the chances that drug users would be arrested again in the future. "In both cases, we're trying to show that common narratives about criminality—'traumatized veterans are dangerous', 'drug users need to be locked up'—aren't supported by empirical evidence," MacLeish noted during the Q&A for Bencsik's talk, adding that such narratives can be reinforced through policy or challenged by changes to it.

Sheila Akavan '23

Sheila Akavan is an MHS graduate student who holds an undergraduate MHS degree from Vanderbilt ('22). During her time at Vanderbilt, Sheila became involved in a Virtual Reality (VR) mental health peer support platform known as Innerworld. This sparked an interest to examine the intersection between VR technologies and mental health care, and specifically the role of peer support in mental health. Her research uncovers various factors that hinder people from seeking mental health support, with the most prominent being stigma, socioeconomic status, and physical availability. VR technologies provide the opportunity for people with mental illness to bypass these barriers while simultaneously receiving a supportive peer network. Sheila's work at Innerworld as a mental health facilitator and a research assistant helped her better understand the implications of VR platforms for the future of mental health care. Sheila's ultimate goal is a career in medicine.



Gabrielle Curran '23



After graduating cum laude with her BA, MHS degree at Vanderbilt, Gabrielle Curran returned as an MA student in MHS. Before transferring to Vanderbilt as a junior, she was a Division I athlete, and she walked away from a full scholarship to focus on her dream of becoming a doctor. Gabrielle sought out a research lab that aligned with her future aspirations and secured a research position in the Plastic Surgery Lab at Vanderbilt University Medical Center. Her research focuses on the Fitbit Interventional Clinical Trials, which analyze patient ambulation following surgery, using wearable devices to monitor recovery. The results were presented as a poster presentation at the American Society for Reconstructive Surgery conference and submitted for publication in *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery*. Gabrielle also works with Project CURE, Adoration Hospice, and Siloam Health, and as a graduate teaching assistant. Her goal after graduating from the program is to pursue a career in surgery, using her background as a researcher to improve patient outcomes for all.

Before starting her graduate studies at Vanderbilt, Halcyeon Guy attended Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech), where she earned a BS in Criminology and a BA in International Relations, with minors in Italian, Sociology, and Global Engagement. Her research interests focus primarily on research ethics in clinical trials and human subject drug development. Halcyeon's interest was sparked by reading *Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present*, by Harriet Washington. The book sheds light on a little-known aspect of American history: the long history of medical experimentation on Black Americans without their knowledge or consent. Halcyeon hopes to further that illumination with her research. She will conduct archival research in the Vanderbilt University Special Collections and University Archives, the History of Medicine Collection, and the Scarritt Bennett Center to author her thesis. After graduating from Vanderbilt, Halcyeon hopes to work in a capacity that helps make healthcare in the U.S. more equitable.

Halcyeon Guy '23



Ciaja Harbison '23



MHS master's student Ciaja Harbison earned her bachelor's degree from Saint Louis University with a major in public health and a minor in health care ethics. Her interests include health promotion and health disparities. Ciaja's capstone project assesses NCAA and college-level mental health programs for student athletes and makes recommendations for improvement. Ciaja had a successful career as a college basketball player for both Vanderbilt and St. Louis University, where she learned leadership, collaboration, goal setting, communication, and perseverance that will be valuable as she pursues a future career. While at Vanderbilt, she tied the single game record with 41 points and surpassed 2,000 career points. She has also worked with Mother

to Mother and LifeWise STL supporting their missions of helping individuals and families achieve economic wellbeing by providing high-impact, relationship-based programming and addressing systemic barriers to success. After completing her degree, Ciaja plans to pursue a professional basketball career and ultimately start her own non-profit organization to support opportunities for underprivileged communities.

Beatrice Juskeviciute graduated from Cornell University with a major in Biology and Society. She is pursuing a MA in MHS to further her interests in health equity and interdisciplinary approaches to the social foundations of health. As part of her MA capstone project, Beatrice is working with the Tennessee Justice Center to determine the most effective ways to engage medical providers in health equity work. Her research will identify best practices and challenges for medical providers in addressing health disparities related to the social determinants of health. She will develop a toolkit for non-profit organizations to use in improving medical provider engagement. Beatrice is also a student athlete on Vanderbilt's track and field team.

Beatrice Juskeviciute '23



Raegan Kelley '23



Raegan Kelley received a BA from Vanderbilt University in 2022 with a major in MHS and a minor in Spanish. Raegan's enthusiasm for understanding and addressing the social barriers to health drives her research practicum project on the factors that motivate and impede families to follow a prediabetes diet and lifestyle. As part of her work as a research assistant on a study with the Vanderbilt School of Nursing, Raegan assessed the adherence of families with one member with prediabetes to a minimally processed whole foods diet for two weeks. Raegan is passionate about making a significant impact in the field of healthcare after the completion of her master's degree. She additionally dedicated herself for five

years as a student-athlete on the Vanderbilt women's soccer team, completing her last season in fall 2022. Raegan's long-term aspiration is a career in medicine while continuing to participate in community outreach programs, especially those that serve youth and youth athletes.

Ashley Keyes' research focuses on women's health and health outcomes in relation to parental leave policies. Ashley evaluates the impact of gender equality, labor policy, and family structure to further uncover motives behind policymaking. Determined to improve the current state of postpartum health in America, Ashley's analysis of parental leave policies from other countries suggests possible policy improvements in the U.S. Ashley's academic accomplishments include graduating from Augusta University with honors and distinction in research. Ashley has ample leadership experience, serving as the chair of publicity for the student chapter of Doctors Without Borders/Friends of MSF and as the president of a multicultural student organization at Augusta University. Her professional experience includes employment at VUMC and a clinical observership at Augusta University Care Center. Some of Ashley's interests include learning about other cultures through reading and travel, volunteer work at Copeland Elementary School, and shadowing at Vanderbilt Center for Women's Health. Ashley plans to apply to medical school and pursue a career in Obstetrics and Gynecology.

Ashley Keyes '23



Nicole Nguyen '23



Nicole Nguyen is an MHS master's student who graduated from Vanderbilt in 2022 with a major in Neuroscience. After studying abroad at the University of Edinburgh in 2020, she became interested in health communication and disparities, influencing her graduate enrollment in MHS. She works in Dr. Paul Newhouse's lab at the Vanderbilt Psychiatric Hospital to research the potential of neuroplasticity-based computerized cognitive remediation for chemotherapy-related cognitive impairment. Her graduate capstone research project focuses on cognitive illnesses in the aging incarcerated population in the U.S. Little previous research has been done on the prevalence and treatment of individuals with dementia in prisons. Nicole's research draws on current interventions for incarcerated people with

mental illnesses to provide recommendations on how to improve treatment for people with dementia. Nicole's goal after completing her master's degree is to pursue a medical career in neurology and treat older patients experiencing various cognitive impairments.

Emma Ornduff completed her undergraduate degree at Wake Forest University, earning a BS in Biology and minors in Neuroscience, Psychology, and Bioethics. During her time there, she worked as a researcher in the Maier Lab, which studies neurological flavor perception and food choice behavior. As an MHS master's student, Emma's research interests focus on trauma-informed care for veterans. Her culminating master's practicum examines the unique challenges faced by those who have served in the military and develops interventions sensitive to the needs of this population. Emma's desire to improve healthcare for veterans has led her to pursue a career in medicine, and she will begin her first year of medical school at East Tennessee State University's Quillen College of Medicine in August 2023. She is eager to apply her research skills and knowledge to a medical career, with the goal of helping underserved, vulnerable, and minority populations receive the care they deserve.

Emma Ornduff '23



Nicolás Prada-Rey '23



Nicolás Prada-Rey is a master's candidate in MHS and will be earning the Global Health Certificate from the Vanderbilt Institute for Global Health. He received his bachelor's degree from Vanderbilt in Spring of 2022 after majoring in MHS, Spanish and Portuguese, and minoring in French. Motivated by his interest in the accessibility of healthcare in the U.S., his research interests include health disparities and health services. Nicolás's thesis investigates how the Project Access model of care addresses healthcare disparities and breaks down barriers to care through a case study of Project Access Nashville Specialty Care. Utilizing interviews, surveys, focus groups, and referral and enrollment data, Nicolás explored and critiqued a less popular model of care

that aims to improve access to affordable healthcare in the U.S. Upon graduating, Nicolás hopes to pursue a career in global health to address current and emerging global health challenges in resource-constrained Lusophone and Francophone countries. Afterwards, Nicolás plans to return to school to obtain his doctoral degree and become a university professor in global health.

Sonali Prillman received her bachelor's degree from the George Washington University in May 2022, where she double majored in History and Biology while minoring in Judaic studies. Motivated by a personal interest in the history of motorcycle clubs and military history, Sonali's thesis focuses on the relationship between motorcycle clubs and military veterans. Her thesis aims to understand why military veterans join motorcycle clubs as well as to examine veteran identity and experience. Sonali utilizes data from blogs and interviews she conducted with military veterans who are members of motorcycle clubs. Exploring this topic will highlight what it means to be a veteran, what veterans gain from being in a motorcycle club, and bring awareness to out-of-norm scopes of practice that can be used by military veterans to increase their quality of life. After graduating, Sonali hopes to continue studying medical history, bioethics, and new ways to advance the health of populations.

Sonali Prillman '23



Finn Shelp-Peck '23



Finn Shelp-Peck earned their BS in Biology and Public Health with minors in Professional Writing and Media Development and Chemistry from Meredith College. Their passion for LGBTQ+ healthcare stems from their involvement in the queer activist community in the Raleigh-Durham area of N.C. While in the MHS MA program, they are working in the LGBTQ+ Policy Lab and shadowing physicians who provide gender-affirming care in Vanderbilt Medical Center's Plastic Surgery Department. Finn's thesis research focuses on differences in mental healthcare utilization in cisgender, transgender, and gender non-conforming university students. For the quantitative aspect of their thesis, they are using a survey of college students in the U.S. called the

2021–2022 Healthy Minds Study. Finn hopes that studying the utilization of formal mental health services and the alternative support networks within the community will help inform medical professionals and public health specialists in creating resources to promote better mental health outcomes. Following the MHS program, Finn plans to attend medical school and use what they learned in the program to be an inquisitive and attentive physician.

Alycia Shipley graduated from Vanderbilt with a double major in MHS and Political Science in 2022. As an undergraduate she developed a strong interest in understanding the impact that institutions and societies have on people's lived experiences and their access to healthcare. Her passion for politics and health equity for marginalized communities led her to pursue the MHS graduate program and a career in public health. Currently, Alycia is working on her capstone project, which focuses on the evaluation of the Connecticut Opioid Response (CORE) Initiative. Her research examines the implementation and impact of the initiative, using quantitative data to evaluate the effectiveness of the program and identify areas for improvement. Alycia intends to continue her pursuit in data analytics after obtaining her master's degree by working with local government organizations and applying to fellowship programs. She aims to collaborate with community organizations and government agencies to advocate for policies that expand access to healthcare services and resources.

Alycia Shipley '23



Kristin Smith '23



In 2021 Kristin Smith graduated with a BS in Biology from Bucknell University with a second major in Women's and Gender studies, and a minor in Dance on the pre-health track. She is a master's candidate in MHS, graduating with an additional certificate in Global Health. At Vanderbilt, Kristin also works as a research assistant in the LGBTQ+ Policy Lab with Professor Tara McKay and Nik Lampe, examining the impact of policy on abortion care for transgender and non-binary people. Motivated by a passion for social justice and health equity, her research interests are informed and inspired by the minority stress theory. Kristin's thesis focuses on multiple aspects of routine reproductive care for LGBTQ+ people compared to those who identify as heterosexual. Her work specifically analyzes nationally representative data to examine rates

and age of HPV vaccination and cervical cancer screening of people assigned female at birth. After the MA program, Kristin plans to work in the arts followed by medical school so that she can work to develop a clinic that provides equitable access and welcoming, trauma-informed care for people of all gender identities and sexualities.

Natalie Thomas is a master's candidate in the MHS program, and she received her BEng degree from Vanderbilt in May 2022, where she majored in Biomedical Engineering on the pre-med track. Natalie's experiences in engineering, combined with her interest in health disparities, influenced her to focus her thesis on the effects of racism related stressors on cardiovascular health in African Americans, particularly in the southeast. In her thesis Natalie analyzes quantitative data from national surveys by examining and comparing the prevalence of measured social stressors and cardiovascular disorders throughout different racial and regional groups. Natalie compares her quantitative findings with the qualitative data from literature pertaining to the social determinants of health contributing to racial health disparities. Through her analyses and comparisons, Natalie highlights how social experiences can further ongoing racial and regional health disparities and suggest solutions on how to resolve these health disparities. After the program, Natalie plans on attending medical school and becoming a cardiologist.

Natalie Thomas '23



Daniel Wrocherinsky '23



MA candidate Daniel Wrocherinsky is motivated by his background in American health inequities and politics from his undergraduate degree in MHS and Political Science at Vanderbilt University. He intends to interrogate how to generate enough political mobilization to tackle environmental, economic, and racial inequities. Inspired by Dr. Jonathan Metzl's book *Dying of Whiteness*, Daniel aims to further understand the sentiments of white working-class (WWC) voters. Despite the widespread harm inflicted on the WWC by government policies and their shared material interests with the rest of the working class, progressives have difficulty capturing a supermajority

of their support. In his research, Daniel conducted the first quantitative survey and analysis of resistance to American progressive politics, exploring the gap between widespread support for progressive economic policies and vast disapproval of contemporary progressivism. In collaboration with Dr. Metzl, Daniel's research highlights the main issue holding the WWC back from support is a distrust in the progressive ability to govern without hurting or exploiting working-class economic circumstances. This led Daniel to investigate evidence based sustainable trust building initiatives on disaffected populations through a lens of personnel and resource limitation. This research spans anti-corruption campaigns, medical research efforts, and social movements. After graduating, Daniel hopes to cut his teeth in grassroots organizing efforts continuing for the 2024 election cycle.

Matt Zgombic graduated from Vanderbilt in 2022 as double major in MHS and Spanish. His academic and research interests drove him to continue his studies as an MHS master's student. During his time at Vanderbilt, Matt has worked as a research assistant for the Vanderbilt University Children's Hospital under Dr. William Heerman on a study called COACH. This study implements a community-based intervention with the aim of preventing obesity and promoting healthy lifestyle habits for low-income, Latinx families in the greater Nashville area. Matt completed a part of his capstone project in Seville, Spain, where he worked as a medical assistant for the Santa Isabel Clinic. This helped him evaluate perceptions of the public health response to COVID-19 in Spain among medical professionals and the general Spanish population. His findings were put into conversation with Spain's COVID-19 public health implementations to acquire a multinational perspective of the pandemic's influence and to better inform future public health responses. After graduating from the program, Matt plans to continue working on the COACH study and ultimately apply to medical school.

Matt Zgombic '23



**THANK YOU TO ALL OF THE STUDENTS WHO
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WE APPRECIATE YOU!

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