

SDSU SPH

Spring 2021 Newsletter

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

We continue to make our way through a busy and challenging, mostly remote semester. Public Health students, I want to let you know that our faculty and staff at the School of Public Health are here for you! We are here to continue navigating through the spring semester together, and I want to point out [resources](#) available to provide institutional support. To our faculty and staff, thank you for continuing to stand as a backbone of support, for your thoughtfully crafted classes and for all your hard work. And to our alumni, thank you for staying engaged and connected, for asking how you can help, and for your continuing generosity and concern.

We are coming up on our [40th anniversary celebration](#), the week of April 5-11. Please save the dates and note the agenda, as we will hold a world video release of our 40th anniversary video, a special award celebration (hint: the awardee is featured in this newsletter), and a number of other events. [Please consider making a gift to support us during these exciting times.](#)

This semester has been a full one so far. Our school continues to be at the forefront of [COVID-19 work](#) implementing testing, tracing and vaccination-related projects with community partners. We also helped to spearhead a statement from Schools and Programs of Public Health in California regarding the importance of vaccination, and we were honored as finalists for a nationwide community service award. We are also engaged in a number of faculty searches and our students continue to excel, with two of our exceptional students highlighted in this newsletter.

Take care of yourselves, your families, and looking forward to a season of collective vaccination!

Eyal Oren, Ph.D., MS
Interim Director, SDSU School of Public Health

Alumni Feature Dr. Wilma Wooten



Dr. Wilma Wooten, Public Health Officer and Director of Public Health Services in the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA), is being honored by the SPH with our first annual alumni achievement award for her immense contribution to public health across San Diego over the years and during the global COVID-19 pandemic. Although she has served in her current role with San Diego HHSA since 2007, she became a household name as the San Diego Union-Tribune "2020 San Diegan of the Year," navigating our communities through the political, emotional, and logistical challenges of COVID-19. Dr. Wooten will be honored in a ceremony that will take place Friday, April 9 at 1pm.

Dr. Wooten, who grew up in rural Alabama, dreamed of becoming a physician. When she attended Spelman College, she started in a work-study program that taught her the value of written word while paying for her tuition. She went on to receive professional degrees from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, then residency training at the Georgetown/Providence Hospital Family Practice Residency Program. In 1989, she was also an alumna of the joint San Diego State University (SDSU), Graduate School of Public Health (GSPH)/University of California San Diego (UCSD) Preventive Medicine Residency.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Dr. Wooten and SD HHSA leveraged strategic partnerships with local government, schools, businesses, and community-orfaith-based organizations to build capacity for COVID-19 education, outreach, and prevention. Dr. Wooten has navigated difficult situations with local, state and federal government officials, including an unexpected amount of vitriol from some County residents in regards to mask mandates and other public health interventions. Nonetheless, the urgency of the pandemic has not stopped her from continuing a number of important health initiatives around Hepatitis C, Tuberculosis, HIV and Opioid use and Perinatal Equity.

Dr. Wooten continues to serve SDSU SPH in multiple capacities. She serves as an adjunct professor and as a member of the SDSU SPH Advisory Board. Dr. Wooten notes attending SDSU Graduate School of Public Health was an amazing opportunity that connected her to different programs and populations, and gave her the necessary critical thinking skills needed in her career. Her advice to rising public health students is her own personal motto that has helped her cope with the pandemic: "When going through rough times, remember that this too shall pass and stay the course!"



Faculty Feature Dr. Erik Storholm

Dr. Erik Storholm is a passionate researcher and clinical psychologist who has spent decades honing skills to serve marginalized communities through health and behavioral interventions, specifically among people at risk for, or living with HIV. As a CSU alumnus, his journey in academia began while working toward his Bachelor degree at San Francisco State University, where he took a "Psychology of Social Justice" course, which sparked a passion for addressing the needs of marginalized communities. Storholm served the local LGBTQ+ community by volunteering with San Francisco STOP AIDS Project, providing sexual health outreach for LGBTQ+ individuals and later with Project Angel Food - a food-delivery service for individuals living with HIV or terminal illnesses in Los Angeles. Motivated to do more, he continued on to earn his Masters in Psychology at California State University, Long Beach during which time he conducted harm reduction counseling and research with persons who were experiencing homelessness, struggling with substance use, and engaging in sex work at a community research center/food bank in downtown Long Beach where he provided sexual health counseling and STI testing. This experience fostered a longing for clinical training, pushing Storholm to pursue his Ph.D. in Psychology at New York University.

During his doctoral studies, he worked on a longitudinal cohort study following over 600 sexual minority men as they transitioned into adulthood, tracking both protective and risk factors in relation to health outcomes including substance use and HIV risk. He then completed a two year postdoctoral fellowship in substance abuse treatment research at the University of California, San Francisco before taking his breadth of research and clinical skills to work at RAND Health, a think tank in Santa Monica, where he spent the last 5 years leading several NIH-funded projects focused on HIV prevention.

Storholm was excited to join the San Diego State University School of Public Health because he always knew he wanted to rejoin the California State University system as an educator after having such positive learning experiences at CSUs. Storholm believes in the importance of accessible, affordable, and quality education that serves diverse communities. This year in his Human Sexuality and Disease class, Storholm has transformed the challenges of teaching virtually into opportunities for learning, including bringing his students together with guest speakers from across the country who are actually working in the field of sexual and reproductive health. He has enjoyed having the flexibility to accommodate the multiple learning styles of his students provided by the virtual class environment. As a faculty researcher,

Storholm continues to find passion in addressing underserved communities' needs through holistic community-engaged approaches to HIV prevention. Storholm believes this is a very exciting time given the recent biomedical advances in the field of HIV prevention that have the potential for huge impact if we are able to implement these advances through culturally-appropriate prevention interventions or programs and to do it in ways that simultaneously address the health inequities so often faced by these communities.

Anah Esquerio is a 1st year Masters in Public Health - Epidemiology student. For her undergraduate degree, Anah received her Bachelor of Science in Global Health from University of California, San Diego (UCSD) in June 2020, where she was the recipient of a Chancellor's Associates Scholarship. While at UCSD, Anah was the Co-Director of Student Promoted Access Center for Education and Services (SPACES), a student-run program that focuses on resource access and school retention, particularly for underserved students. Anah also was co-chair of the Native American Student Alliance and Native Retention Coordinator at SPACES.

After beginning her MPH program SDSU in the Fall 2020, Anah was recruited to serve on a team with UCSD researchers for the California American Indian Tobacco Initiative Evaluation (CAITIE), which is evaluating the impact of funding aimed at reducing tobacco use in Native American communities. While Anah had served as an intern for CAITIE since February of 2020, she took the new role as a program survey worker in August 2020. In this role, she built systematic approaches to contacting Native American leaders and communities, and conducted qualitative interviews with these contacts using a code book she created using Native American literature and research.

In 2021, Anah has been selected to join the competitive ASPPH Student Leadership Institute (SLI). SLI is an honor for students nominated by faculty to join student leaders from across the U.S. in leadership skill-building and networking.

Graduate Student Feature

Anah Esquerio

Master in Epidemiology



On-campus, Anah is also co-leader of a SDSU social group called "Isolation Buddies" that provides emotional and social support to peers who chose to quarantine or isolate after a COVID-19 by allowing space to process the difficulties of the pandemic or to simply have fun with virtual game nights.

After she completes her MPH, Anah can see multiple future opportunities including pursuing an entry-level Masters in Nursing or Ph.D. of Epidemiology to focus on conducting research on health in Native communities. No matter her path, Anah sees taking her passions and education to serve Native Communities in health initiatives or research in the future.

Undergraduate Student Feature

Sandhya Muthuramalingam

Public Health & Interdisciplinary Studies



Sandhya Muthuramalingam is sophomore majoring in Public Health, minoring in Interdisciplinary studies. She is a part of Weber Honors College program, a honors program that emphasizes diversity, creativity, and interdisciplinary academic excellence. Sandhya has been recognized for her academic achievement by being honored on the Dean's List in Fall 2019 and Spring 2020.

Sandhya is expanding her research experience by joining Dr. Kristen Emory on a qualitative study on health in the sex trade industry in Zambia. Sandhya also hones her leadership skills by serving as the Co-Chair of Fundraising for the Student for Public Health student organization, where she has successfully raised \$500 to be donated to ICU Nurses, Making Strides against Breast Cancer, and the UCSD Medical Center. During the fall semester of 2020, Sandhya interned at the County of San Diego's Live Well San Diego, where she developed and led listening sessions with community partners and youth groups. She even hosted an event called "Let's Hear from You(th)! Engaging Youth Voices at San Diego County" at the annual Live Well Advance Conference in 2020.

Sandhya plans to pursue a Masters in Public Health in Epidemiology, with the hopes of becoming a community health specialist or an epidemiologist. With much of her program ahead, Sandhya is looking forward to upper divisional courses and field placement learning opportunities to solidify her future goals. In her spare time, Sandhya is an activist for movements addressing health disparities such as Black Lives Matter, They can't burn us all (Asian-American movement against hate crimes), and Farmer Protests in India.



The School of Public Health will be celebrating its 40th Anniversary on April 5 to April 11, 2021, all events will be taken place remotely. Please see our website for the agenda and exciting details, including our anniversary video roll-out!