

## Building Bridges: Students, Alumni and the Internship Experience

*By Brian Bieber (MPH 2007)*

A phone call from a University of Michigan alumnus persuaded me to attend the UM School of Public Health (SPH). After listening to her describe her job as an epidemiologist at a local health department, I made the decision to pursue a career in public health. Little did I know that one year after that conversation, the caller, Laura Bauman, would supervise and mentor me in my position as the epidemiology intern for the Washtenaw County Health Department.

I located my internship at the Washtenaw County Health Department with the help and guidance of the Office of Public Health Practice. At the health department, Laura provided me with a broad range of experiences that have proven to be an essential part of my education and development as a public health practitioner. I conducted West Nile Virus surveillance, worked with the Michigan Department of Community Health to research the usefulness of robins in WNV surveillance, researched county level diabetes indicators, and contributed to a team formulating long-term chronic disease goals for the county. Laura did an excellent job of providing my internship with a sufficient amount of structure while patiently allowing me to pursue my own interests and explore the capacity of a local health department to promote the well-being of its constituents. Further, Laura taught me the importance of cross-disciplinary relationships in public health by including me in meetings and committees with health educators, public health nurses, leaders of community organizations, and the health department leadership. Even more important to my professional maturation has been the time that Laura intentionally spent to mentor me, provide me with insight into the practice of public health, and encourage me as an aspiring epidemiologist.

Following the completion of my internship, Laura has continued to advise me and be available

*By Laura Bauman (MPH 1998)*



It's that time of the year again: time to select an epidemiology summer intern. In early February, five resumes arrived in my in-box from the Office of Public Health Practice. I always enjoy the interviews, when I hear about each student's passions and interests, and get a glimpse of unfolding career paths. Deciding which student to offer the internship to is always difficult. They are all bright, have good technical skills, and are enthusiastic about getting practical experience at a local health department.

Last year, my decision was a bit easier since one student truly stood out: Brian Bieber. I had already had contact with Brian before the internship process. The previous spring, as part of my role on the SPH Alumni Board of Governors, I was asked to call Brian and several other potential epidemiology students, who had been accepted to SPH but had not yet enrolled. I remember Brian was quite interested in hearing about the work life of a local epidemiologist. Nine months later, when Brian interviewed with me for an internship, it was clear he was passionate about working at the community level. In addition, he had a stellar academic record, was well spoken, and I was confident he could work independently with minimal supervision.

Interns do take time to train and mentor, but I find it is well worth it as they make a real and substantial contribution. Last summer, our health department would have had a difficult time conducting bird surveillance without Brian's help and dedication. The surveillance system was set up for West Nile virus monitoring, but 2006 also brought the threat of avian influenza and this was clearly on the public's mind as they called the hotline. Brian went above and beyond in answering questions, always offering additional information by mail or by Internet. He learned quickly and soon came up with ways to improve the system. Brian was intrigued by the potential role of robins in the West Nile trans-

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Department of Epidemiology  
109 Observatory  
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## Alumni Highlight

# Luisa N. Borrell, DDS, PhD '01

**Assistant Professor  
Director of Master's Program  
in Epidemiology  
Department of Epidemiology  
Mailman School of Public Health  
College of Dental Medicine  
Columbia University  
New York, NY 10032**

Upon obtaining a dual degree in dentistry and general public health (DDS-MPH) at Columbia University in 1994, I completed a General Dentistry Residency Program at Mount Sinai Medical Center in New York. From 1994 to 1996, I worked in private practice in Washington Heights and at the Children's Aid Society in Harlem. Then, I enrolled in a Dental Public Health residency at Montefiore Medical Center in Bronx. These experiences increased my awareness to the health needs of subgroups of the population and heightened my interest in public health. As a result, in 1997, I successfully applied for the Ph.D. program in Epidemiologic Sciences at the University of Michigan, School of Public Health (UMSPH).

During my second year at UMSPH, I worked with Dr. Sherman James at the Center for Research on Ethnicity, Culture and Health as a research intern. This work experience had an ever-lasting impression on my career development by helping me decipher the complex biological, socio-economic, and cultural determinants of health. In addition, I was a teaching assis-



tant for several courses at UMSPH. These teaching experiences have proven invaluable for my current position.

As a National Research Scientist Award fellow in the dental public health program working under the directorship of Dr. Brian Burt, I also had the opportunity to be mentored by Drs. Sowers, James, Neighbors, Lynch, Foxman, Peyser, Harlow and Kaplan among others. Their mentorship brought different perspectives to my career development and continues to do so today: epidemiological methods, the epidemiology of dental diseases, the implications of the use of race/ethnicity in research and the effects of socioeconomic inequalities on health.

Upon the completion of my Ph.D. in 2001, I joined the faculty at the Mailman School of Public Health, and later, the faculty at the College of Dental Medicine, Columbia University. My research interests focus on the social determinants of health

and the effect of race/ethnicity as a social indicator of vulnerability and consequences of exposures throughout an individual's life-course. These issues are clearly imprinted throughout my publication record.

As a faculty member, my responsibility is divided into research, teaching and service. A major part of my time is devoted to research, namely writing grant applications and manuscripts. The bulk of these works examine the role and consequences of race/ethnicity, socioeconomic position and neighborhood effects on health. Although I have been successful with grant applications and publications, my passion lies in teaching and mentoring. I have been involved in curriculum issues, such as restructuring existing and developing new courses as well as review of our methods core courses sequence in our Master's program. As the director of our Master's program since October 2005, I dealt with issues related to admission and curriculum in the program as well as daily advising and mentoring of students. In addition, I am involved in two postdoctoral training programs, the Robert Wood Johnson Health & Society Scholars and the Kellogg Health Scholars Program.

My experiences inside and outside the UMSPH classroom provided me with the knowledge, preparation and skills for the demands of a faculty position. These qualities are clearly displayed in my knowledge of epidemiology and my work ethic. My visits to the UMSPH upon graduation always elicit the same thought—I could not have attained my education in a better place than the UMSPH.

### *“Bieber” continued from page 1*

whenever I have questions about local public health. Most recently she wrote a letter of recommendation that helped me land a position as the Ottawa County epidemiologist in Holland, Michigan. From recruiting me as an indecisive potential graduate student, to mentoring me during my summer internship, to finally helping me secure employment, Laura Bauman has been a guiding force in my training and development as an epidemiologist.

### *“Bauman” continued from page 1*

mission cycle, so we set up a pilot project with the state health department.

Surge capacity, during outbreaks or disasters, is a pressing need in local public health. Graduate students are one possible resource, and we put this idea to the test as Brian worked alongside me during a food borne outbreak investigation involving hundreds of people. We crafted the on-line questionnaire together and then ran 2 X 2 tables on the 600 people who completed the survey. All of this was done under intense time pressure, and Brian's help was invaluable.

Brian was also much appreciated by others at the health department. We were conducting an extensive community assessment,

and I asked Brian to develop a diabetes indicator and to work with the team that was evaluating chronic disease. I frequently heard from other staff how helpful he was in answering data questions. Brian's familiarity with our community survey data was key in my decision to hire him again several months ago when we wanted to convert the data for use on the Web. I knew he could work independently and had technical expertise that I did not.

I am thrilled that Brian will soon be a true colleague as a local epidemiologist in Michigan. I look forward to seeing him at conferences, working with him on statewide projects, and hearing how his career is unfolding.

# Updates

Please update us on where you are and what you are doing.

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**Phone:** 734-764-8093

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I prefer to be informed electronically of major events, newsletters, etc. (please update email address above)

## Epidemiology Student Organization

The wind of change is blowing through SPH, and just as our buildings are undergoing great transformation and improvements, so is the Epidemiology Student Organization (ESO). This past year ESO took on the challenge of giving our Department a greater sense of cohesion and community.

Together with the Department, we organized the annual fall BBQ and ice cream social to welcome new students, both of which drew great turnouts. We also revamped the student-to-student Buddy program and held internship workshops, designed using the experience of returning students, to give first year MPH students a head start on that often long and difficult search. However, our proudest accomplishments have been in the areas of improved communication and student advocacy. Communication between departmental committees, student liaisons, ESO and the student body has grown much more transparent this year. Our student body was able to eagerly communicate a wide range of curriculum concerns through ESO to the Academic Committee to effect positive change that this year's MPH class is already able to enjoy.



With this foundation, the incoming ESO board brings a fresh face and new eyes to building the organization. We are eager to continue the work of our predecessors by increasing ESO awareness and participation among alumni, students, faculty, staff, and friends of the Department. In the next year, we hope to host at least two ESO events per semester. Plans are already underway for a student-run academic forum at fall orientation and an internship/career/networking seminar during winter term, in addition to several less formal community-building events. If you are interested in mentoring current students, attending a fall football tailgate or buying official "Michigan Epidemiology" gear, we'd love to hear from you! Email us at [ESOboard08@umich.edu](mailto:ESOboard08@umich.edu).

**Thanks, and GO BLUE!**

Angela Kuznia  
Incoming president  
[akuznia@umich.edu](mailto:akuznia@umich.edu)

Ellen Wan  
Outgoing president  
[ewan@umich.edu](mailto:ewan@umich.edu)

## Upcoming Events Save the Date!

**Michigan Epidemiology Conference**  
April 12, 2007

The 2007 Michigan Epidemiology Conference will be held on April 12, 2007 from 8:45 am to 4:00 pm at the Towsley Center on the campus of the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. This annual event provides a great opportunity to network with epidemiologists from the private sector, local and state health departments, hospitals, and academia. The U of M Epidemiology Alumni Committee will be holding an alumni gathering during lunch. For more information, please go to our website at <http://www.mipha.org/epi/index.htm>

**SER Conference**

June 19–22, 2007, Boston, MA  
Alumni Reception  
Thursday, June 21, 2007  
7:00 pm–8:30 pm  
Boston Park Plaza Hotel  
<http://www.epiresearch.org/meeting/>

**CSTE Conference**

June 24–28, 2007, Atlantic City, NJ  
[www.cste.org](http://www.cste.org)

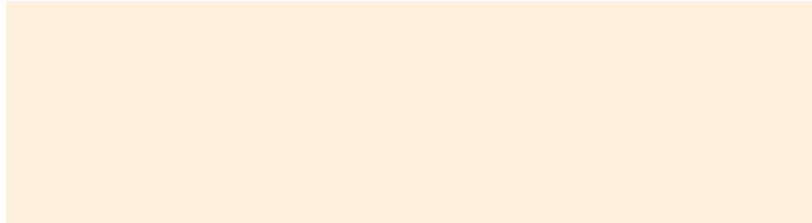
**Graduate Summer Session  
in Epidemiology**

July 8–July 27, 2007  
Accepting applications now.  
[www.sph.umich.edu/epid/GSS](http://www.sph.umich.edu/epid/GSS)



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**Spreading Holiday Cheer** The Department of Epidemiology held an Annual holiday gathering at the Chair’s home. From left to right: Ellen Wan, Dr. Sioban Harlow, Dr. Hal Morgenstern, Jessica Naff and Anne Styka.

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