Community Health Welcomes New Chair
Lynne Pepall

Tiffany Addo ’20

The Community Health Department is delighted to welcome it’s new Chair!

Lynne Pepall, a Professor of Economics at Tufts, is the new Chair in the Community Health Department. Her research is in industrial organization and applied micro theory, which simply means that Professor Pepall is interested in modelling economic interactions in ways that help us understand competition in the market place. This perspective is important to laying the foundation for competition policy and understanding what makes markets work or not work well.

Professor Pepall previously served as a graduate dean and oversaw programs in Education, Occupational Therapy, Child Studies and Human Development, and UEP. Thus, she has considerable experience in working with programs that are practice-based and engaged with communities. It is important that students in these kinds of programs receive a high quality experience both in and out of the classroom setting for their professional development. Professor Pepall has also served as Chair of the Tenure and Promotion Committee and is familiar with how the tenure process applies to different fields—a background that will hopefully serve well the junior faculty in the CH department.

Professor Pepall, in her new role as Chair of the department, hopes she will help forge connections between Economics and Community Health. She views the two departments as having overlap both in research and student interest, recognizing that the health sector is an important part of the economy. This semester, Professor Pepall is teaching an upper-level seminar on the economics of advertising and its role in the market economy. In the future, she would like to be able to see more health economics courses that are accessible to students in the CH major. Professor Pepall also hopes to be a resource for CH students. She enjoys understanding what students want from their academic preparation, their interests in learning and their aspirations, and she knows a lot about what the university has to offer beyond the individual departments and how to best make connections with and for students.

During her undergraduate years in Canada, Professor Pepall did not foresee herself having a career in the field of economics. She did not give much thought to a career at all. She was highly trained in mathematics and delved into economics out of curiosity only to realize that she knew very little about the economy and how society was organized. As a result, she wanted to learn more and so pursued a Ph.D. even though a career in academics was not her initial goal.

Professor Pepall believes that it is important for students to consider the skills, such as writing, critical thinking, analytical and computational, associated with the courses they take, and to focus on developing those skills so they may be prepared for whichever future career they pursue. Professor Pepall ultimately believes that it is important to pursue a career that is as equally rewarding for the individual as it is for society. She says, “so, whatever you study at Tufts, make sure you enjoy it!”

Outside of work, Professor Pepall spends her time with her family and their golden retriever who by the way has an outstanding Instagram page and a good following! She enjoys walking the dog, eating well and doing yoga. During her sabbatical in Cambridge, England last year, (where she did her graduate work) Professor Pepall and her husband took their dog with them to England on the ocean liner the Queen Mary 2.

Dr. Pepall loves how helpful and dedicated everyone within the Community Health department is, and she is excited to be a part of it!
MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIR

I am simply delighted to have the opportunity to join the department of Community Health and take on this exciting leadership role. To me the department lies at the heart of Tufts University’s core values, providing for our students a cutting-edge academic and research environment dedicated to improving the well-being of individuals, communities, and societies. The signature themes of Tufts University--health sciences, active citizenship, interdisciplinarity and a global perspective--define and distinguish a Tufts education, and each theme is woven into the programming in Community Health. It is no surprise that Community Health is one of the fastest growing departments in Arts and Sciences.

My academic home is in the discipline of Economics, which shares Community Health’s commitment to social welfare and public policy. My area of expertise in Economics is Competition Policy and Strategy. In addition, I served for eight years as the Dean of the Graduate School of Arts & Sciences, and recently completed a three-year term as a member and Chair of the AS&E Tenure and Promotion Committee. I also served as chair of the Economics department.

My past experiences at Tufts have given me considerable appreciation of the challenges facing faculty and students working across multiple disciplines as well as some insight into how such challenges may best be met. I am hopeful that this will help me as I take up the position of chair of Community Health. I am sure that I have a great deal to learn from all of you and I sincerely hope that I can look forward to getting to know you and to working with you on building the very best Community Health Department.

Community Health Class of 2019

In May 2019, Community Health honored 58 graduating seniors at Senior Event held in Cohen Auditorium.
Stigma Unstuck: A Mental Health Arts Series at Tufts

by Alejandro Baez ’21

Stigma Unstuck: A Mental Health Arts Series at Tufts is a multi-event art series that focuses on bringing greater awareness and understanding to mental health issues with the goal of shifting attitudes that perpetuate stigma and discrimination in our community. Stigma Unstuck is modeled after the Scottish Mental Health Arts and Film Festival started in 2007 which is an 8-week festival hosted by the University of South Wales that gathers scientists, artists, and community members in order to explore current mental health issues. With collaboration from the Tufts Community Health Department and the Community Health Improvement Department of Cambridge Health Alliance, Stigma Unstuck was created. Through support with local organizations such as the National Alliance on Mental Illness - Massachusetts, multiple events were put on throughout spring semester that brought members from surrounding communities such as Medford and Somerville alongside Tufts students for engaging and informative events.

Throughout the fall 2018 semester, Stigma Unstuck was busy incorporating an exhibit titled, The Many Faces of Our Mental Health, into our series. The artist, Lynda Curtrell, worked in collaboration with partners from science and journalism to create this piece; large scale portraits, three-dimensional sculptures, video installations and paintings are used to address and challenge our perception surrounding mental illness, specifically schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. The spring 2019 semester saw the exhibit on full display at the Tufts Collaborative Learning and Innovation Complex (CLIC). Various tours were given to numerous groups while the exhibit was on display. Aside from the exhibit, we’ve also hosted a screening of “Addiction”, a documentary by PBS’ NOVA that displayed individuals struggles with addiction and delved into how addiction affects the brain and discussed the role of evidence-based treatments. The screening was followed by a panel conversation and audience Q&A about the stigma surrounding addiction and how we can change the conversation about addiction to reduce language and attitudes that perpetuate stigma and prevent people from seeking treatment. Other events included booking TuneFoolery to play at Tufts; TuneFoolery consists of musicians in mental health recovery. Through performance, performers are given employment, empowerment, self-reliance, and they help reduce stigma surrounding mental illness. Our final event of the semester was a workshop by the Center for Mindfulness and Compassion at the Cambridge Health Alliance. The workshop, called the 5 Rhythms: Flowing, Staccato, Chaos, Lyrical, Stillness, leads participants onto a journey with music that goes at your own pace and respects your body’s strengths and limitations.

Next semester we will continue our work but with a focus on student mental health. We wish to continue engaging the Tufts community alongside working with youth from Medford and Somerville. Events that help with skill-building aside from the usual informative-based work we’ve done is also something that we hope to integrate for next semester!

Update Fall 2019

On November 5, 2019, Tufts Community Health Dept. hosted “This is My Brave”, an inspiring 90-minute mental health performance event featuring college students sharing their stories of overcoming mental illness through essay, poetry, comedy, and music. All stories aim to help end the stigma surrounding mental illness.

To find out more about This is My Brave www.thisismybrave.org

“Storytelling saves lives.”
STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Representing Community Health at the American Public Health Association National Meeting

Seblewongel Yigletu’20 discusses her experience at the APHA conference.

Last November, I had the unique opportunity of representing the Spring 2018 Community-Based Participatory Research class at the American Public Health Association National Meeting (APHA) in San Diego, California. Our class, Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) (offered every spring if anyone is interested), collaborated with the Medford Family Network to explore how to better engage immigrant parents of children 0-8 years old. With the help of various additional community partners such as The Welcome Project and the Medford Housing Authority, we completed an entire research project from developing our research question to conducting a focus group and even disseminating our results in just one semester! Alongside hosting a community share-back to share our findings with those in our focus group, we submitted an abstract to APHA and to our delight were accepted to present a roundtable discussion on the lessons learned from our undergraduate-academic collaboration!

Presenting a roundtable discussion at APHA sounded daunting at first, however, through the fabulous mentorship of Dr. Shalini Tendulkar and the amazing support of our entire team it was a success! The roundtable discussion format at APHA included 3 semi-structured rounds, over the course of an hour and a half, with about 8

CH student speech on International Women’s Day, Period.

Jessica Fan ’19 shared the speech she gave at an International Women’s Day event hosted by the Nepali Global Women’s Network and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology on March 10, 2019. She spoke about menstrual equity in Nepal and the United States, and advocated for more conversations about periods in order to reduce the shame and stigma surrounding the normal biological process.

Hi everyone! My name is Jessica and I’m a senior pursuing my undergraduate degree in Community Health at Tufts University. I’m also a competitive swimmer on the Tufts Swim Team and an intern at Asian Task Force Against Domestic Violence, a Boston-based domestic violence organization that serves the Pan-Asian community.

To start, I just want to thank you all for coming today and celebrating the 109th International Women’s Day with us. I am so honored to be here speaking about a topic that’s not new, but very important to all of us. Today, I am here to have a conversation with you all about menstrual equity.

Periods. It’s such a simple word, but it can hold so much fear, stigma, and shame. In many cultures around the world, girls often miss out on education or are exiled from society just because they’re menstruating. The stigma of menstruation is not foreign to Nepalese communities. In some rural areas, many believe that women who are menstruating are impure and bring bad luck; thus, subjecting them to the practice of chaupadi. This practice is not only discriminatory towards people who menstruate, but is also extremely dangerous. In fact, in December 2016, two Nepalese teenagers died within weeks of each other due to hypothermia and asphyxiation from fires they made to keep warm in the huts they were exiled to during menstruation. Half a year later, another young woman died due to a poisonous snake bite during her period-banishment.

Unfortunately, this problem is not exclusive to Nepal. Femme folks across the United States, which is supposed to be one of the most powerful, free, and progressive countries in the world, are suffering from menstrual-related discrimination, as well. From a young age, girls are taught to hide their menstrual products and conditioned to believe that leaking is one of the greatest causes for embarrassment for someone who menstruates can experience. The second time I’ve ever had my period, I leaked during swim practice and was laughed at by all the High School boys to the point where I ran out of the pool and didn’t come back. I was 11 years old. In retrospect, this is more a comment on society, social norms around menstruation, and the secrecy and shame that are placed on the issue, than anything else.

As people who menstruate grow older, it doesn’t seem to get easier, especially for those who are poor, homeless, or in the prison system. According to a female prison inmate in California, “Pads are not dispensed as they are supposed to be. We are forced to...
When I began my search for my Community Health internship, I had found myself studying internships that spanned both of my majors would be nearly impossible. As a Community Health and Middle Eastern Studies double major and Arabic minor, I’m fascinated by infectious disease trends in zones of crisis and among displaced populations in the Middle East. Flash forward to my interview at the International Society for Infectious Diseases (ISID), where my interviewer, and now supervisor, told me that they were just beginning a project that was looking at emerging infectious disease trends in areas affected by war in the Middle East.

Since beginning at ISID, I have been cleaning and extracting data from ProMED posts from seven countries in the Middle East. ProMED is a publicly-available emerging diseases and outbreak alert system that is run by ISID. Now that the data is in a usable state, we are just beginning to discover the layers of analysis we can do with it. Between assessing trends in vaccine-preventable diseases, WASH-related diseases, or vector-borne diseases, the opportunities seem endless. In essence, this project has given me a glimpse of what I hope to spend my future pursuing.

In another surprise twist of fate, one of the leaders of this project is a British researcher who contributed to a paper I used as inspiration while developing my thesis. She also happened to be needing another set of hands on a project she was beginning, which looks at WHO’s Early Warning, Alert and Response Network (EWARN) and Early Warning, Alert and Response System (EWARS). While technically in the Middle Eastern Studies Department, my thesis focuses on the weaponization of disease in the Yemeni and Syrian Civil Wars, and through it I had become familiar with EWARN and EWARS. So, I of course quickly volunteered, and now get to help develop this data with new analyses.

Above anything, my internship at ISID has shown me that there are people who are interested in the same niche of Community Health that I am and who blend these two disciplines in a way I hope to join. It has been incredibly rewarding and is far more than I ever expected to find in an internship!

Update: Maia is a TB Drug Assistance Program Specialist at Community Research Initiative in Charlestown. Maia will also be going to ISID’s International Congress on Infectious Diseases in Kuala Lumpur in February as an ISID staff member to help set up the conference and will be presenting a poster on the research she did during her internship. (She is continuing to do so now - making it into a manuscript!)

Jessica Fan speaking out

INTERNSHIP SPOTLIGHT

Bridging two majors in one internship

Maia Tarnas ‘19, describes her experiences at her internship, International Society for Infectious Diseases

Period speech cont’d

reuse them, we are forced to beg for what we need, and if an officer is in a bad mood they are allowed to take what we have and say that [the inmates] are hoarding.” That is life as a person who menstruates in the United States of America - stigmatized for something that is completely natural. For people who are poor, they are sometimes forced to choose between buying food, paying for heat or rent, and buying menstrual products.

However, it doesn’t have to continue being this way. Fortunately, we are in a changing time. Policies in Massachusetts and 10 other states have been passed to eliminate taxes on menstrual products. Non-profit organizations, such as Lava Mae, are providing low-income and homeless folks with clean hygiene areas, as well as access to menstrual products. Most importantly, attitudes about periods are changing and that begins with all people, regardless of whether or not they menstruate, having conversations about periods as a normal biological process, as opposed to a disease or shameful event.

By starting this conversation, we are at the same time prioritizing femme health, education, and success, especially for today’s youth. When girls begin to menstruate, it is also when they are going through an array of psychological changes. Therefore, to cope with all of these changes, they need social support from their families and communities. This year’s theme for International Women’s Day is #BetterForBalance. By supporting girls and not discriminating against them for this biologically normal process, we are all lending a hand in providing them a more balanced life where they can focus on school and friends, and not how their family will react when they get their period, or where they are going to get their next pad.

Periods. It is a frightening thing, sure. But, it is also beautiful and sacred. It is a manifestation of human life, and half of the world population is lucky enough to experience something so magical. On this International Women’s Day, I urge you to celebrate yourself, your period, and the periods of all the femme folks around you.

Update: Jessica is currently serving as a Community Youth Empowerment Volunteer with Peace Corps Fiji. Her 2-year site placement is in Navakawau village on the island of Taveuni (also known as the “Garden Island” of Fiji). Her focus in the village is teaching Healthy Living to the primary school, as well as working with village leaders to promote a healthy and active lifestyle for the women and girls there.
FACULTY SPOTLIGHTS

Community Health welcomes two new lecturers

Professor Ashley Holmes

by Heresa Laforce ’19

How are you working to become the instructor you wish you had when you were in undergrad?

I was fortunate to have some really great instructors in college who were invested in my success. However, one thing I wish I had was more help navigating the “hidden curriculum” of higher ed. I was a first-generation college student and felt like I had to figure out a lot on my own… I hadn’t been exposed to scientific journals before, didn’t know what peer review was, and had no idea how to go about finding an internship. [In my class, I] make it a point to share my background and announce an open-door policy for students to meet and ask any questions they may have about higher ed or professional development.

Part of your academic focus is on chronic diseases (cancer). What direction do you envision these conversations will take considering: 1) rising healthcare costs 2) aging population 3) smaller families (growing number of people without children)

Many chronic diseases—such as cancer, which is my research focus—are associated with modifiable risk factors such as diet, lack of physical activity, and smoking. [One direction I envision these conversations will take is changing] from a treatment mindset to a prevention mindset. From a healthcare standpoint, I think it would be more cost-effective to move towards targeting those modifiable risk factors and midstream causes of diseases.

The age structure of a population has a large impact on chronic disease burden. Aging is a non-modifiable risk factor for chronic disease; the longer you live, the more at-risk you become for getting cancer or other chronic diseases. We’re getting better at treating chronic diseases—mostly due to pharmaceuticals—so people are also living longer with these diseases. This will likely be an important conversation, as well. Additionally, smaller family size and children moving further away from parents are issues to be mindful of, particularly for the kinds of healthcare jobs we need. We need specialized people who can help manage and care for aging populations, including end-of-life support.

In your syllabus for CH 99: CHRONIC DISEASE EPIDEMIOLOGY, one of the major assignments is the written grant component. Can you explain the purpose of this assignment in context of career and academic development for students?

I like my assignments to be skills that students can put on a CV and take with them outside of the classroom: grant-writing and practice developing research strategies are skills that will help students get a “leg up” in life and grad school. For the grant, students pursue a research area of their own interest, perform a literature review on that research area/topic, identify gaps in the literature, and creatively come up with ways to address that gap. When we read journal articles, often we are left with many “what if” sorts of questions: “What if I could design my ideal study and ask my ideal question… what would it look like, what population will be served? What’s the hypothesis and how am I going to tangibly measure those outcomes?” I also learn a lot from it, too. Students in the class recently turned in their grant drafts and their interests are so varied!

Please Name

- One course where the coursework sounds interesting
- One course featuring an instructor you admire
- One course featuring a skill/tool that would be relevant to CH students

I think the Tufts CH department is ahead of the curve in so many ways, particularly with the required courses in the CH major model and having an internship be part of the curriculum. I’ve heard nothing but good things about Dr. Kosinski’s Global Health course and really admire her and Dr. Tendulkar’s commitment to pedagogy and student engagement. Race, Ethnicity, and Health is another course that sounds both interesting and powerful.

Because of the small size of the department, CH staff and faculty build close relationships with students, how do you plan to connect with students, especially first-generation and low-income students, aka those who sometimes aren’t as prepared to navigate the “hidden curriculum” of post-secondary education?

I touched on this earlier but, on the first day of class, I state openly that I was a low-income, first-generation college student: my dad is a mechanic and my mom is a cafeteria server. Hopefully that level of honesty and transparency with my students opens the door to communicate and connect with them. I also remember what it was like to be a student and having to balance many things—not just classes and homework, but also work-study jobs, extracurriculars, sick parents and grandparents, etc. — so I try to afford grace and benefit of the doubt whenever I can. Letting students know that I respect them and the other things going on in their lives is crucial for building close relationships.

See more of Prof. Holmes bio on our website

https://ase.tufts.edu/commhealth/faculty/holmes.htm
Professor Cecilia Flores

by Cosima Boettner ’22

Can you give a brief description of your educational and professional background?

I am a double Jumbo. I graduated from Tufts undergrad in 2012. My major was American Studies and I had a focus in Community Health as well, and then in 2013 I did my masters in the Educational Studies Program here. Then I took a little bit of a break because I needed to work and I could not be in school for very much longer; I was a little bit burnt out. I worked in a health center for three years and that was a really formative part of my experience having that real, person-to-person, connection and the work that they were doing there was very transformative. Then I circled back. I always knew I wanted to come back to academia, so I started my PhD program at Brandeis University in 2016 at the Heller School for Social Policy and Management focusing on health equity work.

What influenced you to focus on the topics you are currently studying?

A lot of it is just my experience. From just my passions and my educational work from the very beginning, I always knew I wanted to focus on health inequities and going into the PhD program I had some ideas. I am still very much interested in immigrant health and some of these other areas, but then after having my daughter and having my own experiences with breastfeeding, that really kind of motivated me to investigate a little bit more. Specifically, in my very focused research now is on breastfeeding inequities in the Latinx community, but still overall my interests are still very much health equity focused. Why are some people healthier than others? What can we do to make everyone more healthy? That type of thing.

What brought you back to Tufts?

Dr. Jennifer Allen and I met when I was doing some of the health equity trainings. She came to the health center and participated in one of the trainings, and we started talking. I was so excited to hear more about her visions about community health. I had always loved the department and it was kind of one of those “meant to be” moments, were I circled back to do an informational interview as I was transitioning out of my role at Southern Jamaican Plain Health Center and into Brandeis. She was saying that “We have this position open as a TA for the class, are you interested?” and so I applied and was able to come on board and from there we worked on research projects and all of that.

Can you talk about your Doctoral Candidateship at the Heller School for Social Policy and Management?

I am hoping to finish this May. Currently I am working on getting IRB approval to be able to run a lot of focus groups to learn more about breastfeeding experiences among Latinas and understand if there are differences in terms of race, information accessed, whether or not they are able to meet their goals, and also understanding the barriers that exist that are particular to Boston. In terms of accessing information, employment, things that are getting in the way of meeting their breastfeeding goals. After receiving the IRB approval, I am hoping to move into the data collection phase and then analysis, to then be able to finish.

Do you have a predicted outcome?

I am thinking I will find a difference by race in terms of information accessed with white Latinas mapping out more of the white American population and black Latinas mapping out much more black Americans based on some of the other data that we have that suggests that Latinas map out like that. My hope is to contribute to the literature that forces us to look at Latinas not as monolithic racially and understand that there is racial diversity that exists within the group. That is part of what the project is hoping to do, and then I am also expecting to see a lot of issues with employment because it is really difficult to get paid time off for maternity leave and even if you have paid time off it is very difficult to get pump breaks and there is a lot of other little, but big things, that are dictating people’s ability to continue breastfeeding even if they want to.

Can you talk about the Latino Vegan Catering Company, “Coco Verde Vegan” you co-founded?

All of the things I am doing are all very much connected, so the Vegan Catering Company is very routed in health and very routed in health outcomes. I transitioned to a plant-based diet soon after my daughter was born. She was about six months and we were about to start her on solid foods, and I was really thinking about what I had in my diet and what I wanted to model for her, what I wanted her to eat. It just kind of happened that I was learning a lot about veganism at the time and plant-based diets overall. I loved how I felt, I loved doing a lot of experimenting and all of that, but I really felt I was not able to participate in a lot of our traditions and culture because so many of the recipes I was using and basing off of were what was available online, which was not authentic Latino food. Most of it was more Americanized and even a lot of Asian because a lot of Asian, especially Indian, food is already almost or already vegan so I just started posting my experiments on my personal Instagram. My friends really like the recipes so we launched a blog in February of last year. Soon after that people started asking if we catered. My partner is a chef, he works at a hotel, and I grew up cooking so it was not far out of our wheelhouse and so we ended up launching our business. Now it has been a year since we started catering in August. It has just been really amazing to be doing that and engaging in community events. We have been able to partner with a lot of community organizations and do events. I have no illusions or thoughts that everyone is going to go vegan, but it is more that I am able to share healthier eating that can still be so true to who you are. The American Diabetes and the American Heart Association have both endorsed vegan diets as helpful to manage, prevent, and reverse those conditions. Knowing that Latinos and Black folks in particular are most affected by these illnesses because of structural

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people at my table for each round. During each round, I explained the way our class was structured, the details of our research project, and the overall lessons we learned about having an equitable and successful community-academic collaboration at the undergraduate level. One of the recurring themes that I heard from the people at my table was that they had never heard of a CBPR course being taught at the undergraduate level. Many were very impressed that our Community Health program could give us such an in-depth research experience through coursework that also allowed us to engage in hands-on collaborative learning with the communities around us.

Having the opportunity to attend APHA was an unforgettable experience. Aside from representing our team, I spent 2 days at the conference taking in all that it had to offer! I went to numerous poster sessions, spoke with representatives from different non-profits and research institutions, and even got to hear the Surgeon General speak about the ongoing opioid crisis! I also got the opportunity to engage with students from all across the country who were just beginning their journey in public health, similar to myself, as well learn from those who were much more established in the field. All in all, it was an honor to represent our research team and inspiring to be in a space dedicated to learning with so many public health professionals. I encourage everyone in the CH department to look into ways to have the opportunity to attend the next national meeting of APHA!

See more about student research on our website: http://ase.tufts.edu/commhealth/research/

Cecilia Flores cont’d from page 7

You have done a lot for race and public health can you talk about some of your research and racial justice work?

We talked a little bit about the dissertation itself and how I want to be able to make people more aware of how racism affects specifically the Latinx community. I remember how I always kind of came up in critical race theory here at Tufts so I learned so much about the system of racism and how it affects things and through community health learned about the effects of systemic racism. Those effects on the body and the Nancy Krueger’s embodiment theory was very fascinating yet very disturbing at the same time. For me there is not enough research especially as an afro-Latina, someone who identifies as both black and Latina. There is not enough research about the inclusion of our identity and it becomes very white washed in the overall literature and so part of what I am hoping to do is to contribute to critical race theory and that understanding and complicating of racial identity in the Latinx community.