



June, 2024

News & Updates

Faculty Retreat

We held our annual retreat on May 28th to discuss our education mission and goals, and engage in visioning for the future of the department. As we position ourselves within the new School we look forward to growth and new opportunities for our students!

Awards & Honors

Dr. Jessica LaRose was awarded a new grant as PI: "Redefining BMI: Body, Mind, Inflammation Project." The project is funded by NIH/NIDDK and includes Co-Investigators from across the SOPH: Dr. Autumn Lanoye (affiliate faculty in SBS), Dr. Robert Perera (Associate Professor and Interim Chair of Biostatistics), Dr. Chrisa Arcan (Associate Professor of Epidemiology), and Dr. Anika Hines (Assistant Professor of Health Policy).

Research staff member Nancy Valencia, MSPH was awarded an Academic Community Planning Partnership Grant by VCU's Division of Community Engagement. Read more about the award [here](#).

2024 Outstanding Student Award Winner: Nixon Arauz

Congratulations to Nixon for winning this year's departmental award!



SBS Goes to Washington



Dr. Katherine Tossas, who serves as Director of Massey's Office of Catchment Area Data Analytics, attended the White House Minority Health Forum on April 18, 2024, where she spoke at a breakout session. Read the story [here](#).

On May 15th, Dr. Tossas also attended a Congressional briefing about cancer disparities on Capitol Hill. Read the story [here](#).

2024 Commencement





On May 10, the School of Population Health celebrated its first Commencement Ceremony at Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden. SBS honored doctoral graduate Dr. Briona Phillips, as well as SOPH Teacher of the Year Dr. Dina Garcia, and Departmental Teacher of the Year Dr. Alex Lucas!

Research Wins



Pictured left: Dr. Alejandra Hurtado de Mendoza, Dr. Antonio Villa, and Dr. Vanessa Sheppard.

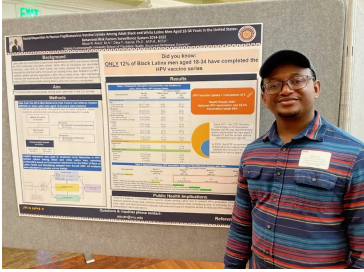
On May 30th, a special meeting was held for the Contigo Project, a collaboration between VCU, Georgetown University (GU), and La Casa de la Salud (LCS). The group celebrated its collective efforts in surpassing its annual recruitment goals by 142%, thanks to the dedicated work of LCS's community health workers (CHWs). During the event, VCU and GU presented all CHWs with small gifts in recognition of their hard work. The event was attended by LCS CHWs, the coordinator, and its director, Dr. Antonio Villa, as well as Dr. Vanessa Sheppard (VCU) and Dr. Alejandra Hurtado de Mendoza (GU).

The Contigo Project aims to enhance genetic counseling and testing uptake, as well as to improve psychosocial outcomes for Latina women at risk for hereditary breast and ovarian cancer.

Student Spotlight

Nixon Arauz was featured by VCU News for his poster presentation at VCU Research Weeks. Read the article [here](#).

Presentations:



Lefeavers S, Russo J. From Red Flags to Freedom: A Human Trafficking Medical Education Pilot Study. 27th Annual VCU Graduate Research Symposium; April, 2024; Richmond, VA.



Lefeavers S. Facilitating a Higher Education Response to Exploitation on Campus, Doing Translational Research: Understanding and Navigating Impactful and Meaningful Research. VCU Research Week; April, 2024; Richmond, VA.



Motto F. Evaluating Partnership Process in a Refugee & Immigrant Oral Health Community Advisory Board (CAB). Presented at the Black Doctoral Network Western Regional Conference; April 2024; Los Angeles, CA.



Motto F, García DT. Building Bridges: Exploring Group Dynamics in an Oral Health Community Advisory Board. Poster presentation at: VCU's 27th Annual Graduate Research Symposium; April 24, 2024; Richmond, VA.



Shah S, Knight Wilt JY, Thomson MD. Investigating Multilevel Factors Influencing Cancer Screening Among Refugee Populations in the United States: A Systematic Review. Presentation at American Society of Preventive Oncology (ASPO); March, 2024; Chicago, IL.



Rivera Mejia P, Zhao J, Owens B, Connolly H, Hunley R, Reitzel S, Winn R, Tossas K. Unveiling Hidden Disparities in Cancer Mortality within Health Planning Regions (VA). Poster presentation at Society of Behavioral Medicine; March, 2023; Philadelphia, PA.

Knight Wilt J, Thomson M. What do Emerging Adults' Future Cancer Considerations Look Like? Oral Presentation at Society of Preventive Oncology; March, 2024; Chicago, IL.

Knight Wilt J, Thomson M. Examining medical mistrust and access to cancer preventive care in a diverse sample. American Association for Cancer



Wellness Wins



Julie Russo ran her second Monument 10k!



Stacie Lefeavers and Julie Russo ran the SPCA 5k!

SBS in the News

Dr. Vanessa Sheppard was featured on the *Healthy with VCU Health* Podcast.

[Listen here](#)

SBS class of 2024 graduate Dr. Briona Phillips was featured by VCU News for her dissertation work on equity in dental care in Baltimore.

[Read here](#)

Dr. Katherine Tossas attended the signing of a new state law meant to make it easier for patients to get colorectal cancer screenings.

[Read here](#)

Upcoming Events

Wednesday June 12th 12:00-1:00pm

Survey Design for Research

Deborah DiazGranados, PhD, Director of Evaluation, Wright Center

Via Zoom

[Register here.](#)

Thursday, June 13th 12:00-1:00pm

Responding to Research Grant Critiques

Hosted by the Wright Center for Clinical and Translational Research

Via Zoom

[Register here.](#)

Monday, June 24th 12:00-2:00pm

Virtual Safe Zone Training

[More info here.](#)

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