



PARKINSON
SCHOOL of HEALTH SCIENCES
AND PUBLIC HEALTH

Bachelor of Science in Public Health Summer 2022 Newsletter

In Conversation with Ruth Kafensztok, DrPH by Rose Thornquist



At twenty-six years old, Dr. Ruth Kafensztok moved to Chicago, Illinois from Rio, Brazil where she earned her multi-disciplinary Master of Public Health equivalent and worked as a public health professional in the public sector. In 1998, Dr. Kafensztok used her skills in data systems, applied research, and statistical programming to start her work on an injury surveillance initiative at Loyola University Chicago as a programmer analyst in a partnership program with an Illinois Department of Public Health. In her first 15 years at LUC, she took on more of a public health practitioner role while she finished her Doctor in Public Health (DrPH) degree. In 2010, she taught her first course, Introduction to Public Health, at Loyola's MPH program. Today, Dr. Ruth Kafensztok is the MPH Program Director and has crafted numerous courses over her time at Loyola. In this interview with fourth-year Parkinson School student, Rose Thornquist, Ruth talks about her time at Loyola, her knowledge of public health, and COVID-19.

What is the difference between getting a Ph.D. and a DrPH?

The first doctoral degree in public health was a DrPH in the early 1900s when public health officials needed to be physicians. They needed to get additional qualification to operate in public health agencies. So, the DrPH program was developed to create that level of expertise, skill, and competency for those physicians. Today, there are more PhD programs than DrPH programs, but the DrPH is becoming more visible in public health again. When I graduated, there wasn't much clarity about the difference in the two degrees. Nowadays, the DrPH has differentiated itself as a practice-based terminal degree geared towards the development of leadership for public health practitioners. A PhD program tends to be full-time while the DrPH program is likely to have more part-time options because the candidates, although not across the board, are likely mid-career professionals who may complete their DrPH while continuing in their workplace. An important point of the DrPH is to bridge academia and practice so that the rigor of learning should be the same whether you are doing more academically-oriented research or applied research.

Why is it important to narrow the gap between academia and practice in public health?

In public health, we have vibrant academic work and vibrant work in practice, but the conversation between academics and practitioners is not as fluid as we'd like it to be. They may not be speaking the same language, so to speak, and the issues they each pay attention to may differ. Public health is a practice-based field by

definition, so it's important to strengthen bridges between academia and public health practice. I think those professionals who have a DrPH are well-equipped to promote this integration.

You've had a successful career as both a researcher and an educator. How was the transition going from research to education?

I worked in the area of injury prevention and control where my activities were focused on the development of data for injury surveillance. The research was very much applied. So, the transition was more pronounced than I thought it would be. I was already physically working at Loyola as a researcher, so I thought it would be easy. My work actually transformed more dramatically from the applied research I was doing to focusing on education and the administrative part of education. However, the part of the transition that connected the process was that I was able to bring my experience as a public health practitioner to the students and the curriculum.

What drives you as a researcher versus what inspires you as an educator?

When I was more focused on my practice with the development of surveillance systems, I worked with existing health-related records and data sets to provide meaningful information for public health planners interested in the area of motor vehicle safety. What drove me in that work was disseminating health data in a manner that could be useful and at the level of data literacy that could be appreciated by professionals that are not trained to analyze data but need to make sense of data in a reasonably accurate way to act upon it. In the educational setting, I had the liberty to bring my professional knowledge and experiences to help develop the MPH curriculum and courses. I loved using statistical programming to help with that and developing my courses in which I was able to integrate some of the information.

What qualities do you try to instill in your students as future public health professionals?

I strive to instill a good and solid theoretical foundation so that they have the knowledge, skills and the tools to problem solve. It's important that in every course the goal is not only to acquire the knowledge but to have the opportunities to apply that knowledge. In addition, we would like to ensure that our graduates have a strong foundation in public health concepts with an emphasis on social justice and health equity and are able to take with them as they go on to the job market and be able to have an impact.

What can public health programs do to attract more students of color so they can be out front in their communities?

One of the things that have been talked about in public health for almost a century is the understanding that health is not only a result of biological processes and there are other determinants of health particularly social ones like housing, education, employment, and the environment. Work on these areas is very important for equity in terms of access to social goods that would ensure equity in health and equity in terms of the opportunities that disadvantaged groups have in education, including graduate professional education. An example would be the development of pipeline programs where we connect with educational institutions serving underrepresented student groups(e.g., Loyola's 2-year associate degree program, Arrupe College) to support students transition in to 4-year college programs

Did the COVID-19 pandemic change your teaching philosophy at all?

It has always been the case that our message is to address health from both a population and prevention perspective within a health inequity lens. However, what COVID-19 did was magnify those issues in a very public and visible way. The MPH program, the Parkinson School, and Loyola emphasize social justice. In the area of public health, that's addressing health disparities and addressing health inequity. What we really want to ensure, especially after the pandemic, is that our students are knowledgeable and equipped to address problems in public health from health equity lenses.

What have you noticed about the attitude change towards public health at Loyola?

When the Parkinson School was created, that in itself already shows the elevation of public health along with other applied health sciences at the university level, and the visibility of public health based on the context of the pandemic has created a tremendous level of interest by students in learning about the field.

When the Parkinson school was opened, what was the most exciting part about that for you?

By virtue of the school's name, the visibility of public health. Also, the fact that Parkinson is an inter-professional school that brings multiple disciplines of health connected by the common aspiration to address health equity issues in innovative ways. That's what I find very attractive about Parkinson.

What do you do to relax?

I am a morning person, so I like to go out early in the morning when there are very few people in the streets and jog. I really appreciate that time because it is a good way for me to start my day. I also like to cook a lot. My kitchen takes me out of the realm of intellectual activities and into the senses of smell, touch and taste that cooking offers.

What's your go-to meal to cook?

I come from a culture where the cuisine is outstanding but very labor-intensive and time-consuming, so there is no way I can cook Brazilian meals with my schedule. My cooking is based on "What can I do in 40 minutes?" Beans and rice are our signature meal in Brazil, and I cook them every other week. I am not a baker because I can't follow a recipe. Recipes only inspire me.

What are your go-to restaurants in the Loyola area or the larger Chicagoland?

The cafeteria in the school of medicine is actually quite good. They have a variety of good options. In my neighborhood, in Oak Park, there is an excellent Brazilian place on the corner of Oak Park and Lake. It's called Mulata, and they have excellent empanadas. (Author's note: I went after Dr. Kafensztok had recommended it, and it is amazing.)

Ruth Kafensztok, Associate Professor, Vice Chair, and Program Director, Master of Public Health Program, may be reached at rkafens@luc.edu

Rose Thornquist is a senior BSPH major and is pursuing a MPH in the Loyola BSPH/MPH dual-degree program.

BSPH Program Director's Note by Julie Darnell, PhD, MHSA



Congratulations to our Class of 2022 Graduates!

May 11, 2022 marked the BSPH Program's second-ever commencement at which we celebrated 15 seniors who graduated with a degree in public health. Besides watching our seniors walk across the stage and receive their diplomas, the most memorable aspect of graduation week for me was listening to our Parkinson undergraduate student speakers who offered reflections during Parkinson's Magis Ceremony.

BSPH Graduate Vinti Bakhshi asked her peers to consider the butterfly effect – the idea that small changes can have a big effect because we are all connected. Vinti also recognized the “elephant in the room” – i.e., COVID – but observed that she and her peers had responded to this challenge by taking a “larger leap” and learning “how we can pivot.” Health Care Administration Graduate Salvatore Carfagno spoke about leadership. Acknowledging challenges such as the pandemic and racism, Salvatore does not simply wish for “circumstances to be different” but sees how these challenges create opportunities to “make the lives of others better.” Exercise Science Graduate Karen Gomez spoke about overcoming her own personal challenges as a first-generation college student and commuter. She credited her family, peers, and professors – her community – for her successes.

What these student reflections have in common is a belief that while challenges are an inescapable part of life, they can be conquered with the support of one's community. Moreover, it is imperative that we view ourselves as part of – both connected to, and in service to – a community.

During an era in which individualism is on the rise (e.g., the right *not* to be vaccinated or wear a mask, the right to own any kind of firearm, the right to continue a high-carbon lifestyle), the centrality of community in each student reflection was both refreshing and inspiring. Our Loyola graduates, whatever their specialization, have embraced fully and unapologetically the value and power of community, a key tenet of public health. In addition, our young alumni frame their life's work in the context of others. I expect that they will use community to confront the challenges ahead. This gives me hope for the future.

Community Organization Highlight and ¡Fiesta del Sol! By Tatiana Pasewark

The Hispanic population of Chicago sits at a small 22%, but in the near south side neighborhood of Pilsen, Hispanics make up over 70% of the community. When my grandparents immigrated from Mexico in the 1960s, Pilsen was a growing haven for immigrants looking for a piece of home. Bilingual signs and education, mass held in Spanish, and a myriad of restaurants along with specialty markets, Pilsen truly is a community more than it is a neighborhood.



My mom grew up in Pilsen, and I have family still living there today; I've also written about this area many times. From all the bad things such as the higher rates of lead poisoning and pollution, education disparities, and gentrification, to the better parts such as the life, culture, and community that has sprouted from this small neighborhood.

As many know, Chicago is an extremely segregated city, making it easy for the city government to forget about certain communities— particularly communities of color— and not provide them the equitable access to resources to live a healthy life. **Pilsen Neighbors Community Council (PNCC)** has been actively working against that to provide its neighborhood with the assets it deserves. This community organization started almost serendipitously; with the increasing number of immigrants and families, the awareness of a lack of community high schools and education disparities grew. Until 1977, the only options for secondary education in the area were an expensive private school or an inaccessible public school that required students to cross gang territory. While my mom was lucky enough to win a scholarship to the private school, she still remembers having to change in the morning while keeping in mind which colors to avoid in case she accidentally wore the wrong ones: you couldn't risk being mistaken for a rival gang, even if it was an accident.

Originally, the Chicago Board of Education denied the need for a new school in the area, but thanks to protests and boycotts of other schools in the southwest side led by PNCC, Benito Juarez Community Academy was established. Moreover, there is a direct connection between education and a better health status; education is a large social determinant of health. The more students in Pilsen that can receive a proper education, the higher their chances of a healthy life.

PNCC is not just an advocate of education. They organize events and resources to positively impact their community in the areas of housing, healthcare, social justice, and immigration. Most notably they were involved in the planning and development of the biological, bicultural, not-for-profit Alivio Medical Center that serves the Latino communities of Pilsen, La Villita/ Little Village, and Berwyn. This medical center is a much needed step towards helping the underinsured, uninsured, and undocumented residents of Chicago, no matter their race. Medical racism negatively impacts communities and individuals of color; from lack of insurance, the social determinants of health, higher rates of adverse childhood events, and lack of equitable access to proper

health care, the Hispanic communities in Chicago need organizations like PNCC to sponsor efforts such as the Alvio Medical Center.

PNCC also hosts workshops aimed at helping their community through immigration reform, workforce development, scholarships, advocacy training, and volunteer experience. While serving the entire Pilsen community, this organization has helped train over 33,000 individuals, awarded 1.1 million dollars in scholarships, and currently has over 250 volunteers. Overall, this organization advocates for its community via members of its community. While they are currently accepting donations, the best way to support this organization is to attend *Fiesta del Sol* this July in Chicago!

Originally a 1973 effort to fundraise for Benito Juarez Community Academy, *Fiesta del Sol* is a four day celebration of Mexican heritage with dancing, food, local vendors, artists, charity, and advocacy that is an integral part of the Pilsen economy to further support the community. Celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, the festival runs from July 28th to the 31st in the Heart of Pilsen! One of their mottos, ¡si se puede! comes from famous civil rights activist Cesar Chavez. The year after he fasted for 25 days to protest the inhuman conditions of migrants and civil rights was the year the original *Fiesta del Sol* was held. This roughly translates to “yes we can” and serves as a reminder of all the work that the Chicano movement, Mexican-Americans, and PNCC have contributed to their people, and a constant motivation for all the work that needs to be done.

So, if you're in Chicago this July, and looking for a free day of art, culture, and advocacy, attend *Fiesta del Sol*. It's a grassroots way to help the Latino communities of Chicago and see the direct impact your donations and purchases can have!

Tatiana Pasewark is a senior BSPH major and is pursuing an MPH in the Loyola BSPH/MPH dual-degree program.

Research Project in Peru By Aman Kothadia



This past April, I was invited to join Dr. Paula Skye Tallman from the Department of Anthropology at Loyola to assist with fieldwork in Peru. I have been working with Dr. Tallman since September 2021 on an international, interdisciplinary research project studying the relationship between water insecurity and gender-based violence in Indonesia and Peru. So far, most of our work consisted of qualitative data analysis from previous phases of research in the communities we are studying. Needless to say, we were very excited to travel to Peru and be able to finally see and speak with the communities we have been reading so much about in our data.

I was joined by my research partner Natalie Archdeacon, Dr. Tallman, and our Peruvian research team led by Dr. Gabriela Salmon-Mulanovich. A short flight from Lima to Piura and we could already see and feel the difference. It was hot. Piura has a dry-forest climate which is a stark contrast to what we experienced in Lima before we got on our flight. Thinking about the heat made me think back to the interviews and data we have been working through. Women in these communities are in charge of all household water tasks, spanning from collection to cooking to cleaning. All families receive about 120 liters of water a week from the local government; however, the United Nations outlines that 700 liters is the absolute minimum per household. Women must either purchase overpriced water that most cannot afford or walk miles on end to carry heavy cans of dirty water from the river in the sweltering heat. This lack of water is a clear human rights violation. We study how these societal pressures to collect water act as a form of violence and how women experience violence during the process.

The two communities we worked in were vastly different. One is located on the left margin of the river with very limited access to the main water reservoir with no canals or piped water. The land was dry and sandy. The other community, however, is on the right margin of the river with direct access to the reservoir and a large canal that runs into the town. Here, we noticed lush green mango groves that weren't even remotely present in the left margin. The biggest thing I noticed was how a lack of infrastructure and luck of location creates such high disparities in water access in these communities, which ultimately impact the local women the most.

We held workshops with local men and women in both communities to better understand the gendered burdens of water collection and concerns. Women spoke about how much they suffered because of the water situation. After months of reading through earlier data, being in Peru and finally seeing everything, it was shocking. We knew how serious the issue was but seeing it with our own eyes was just a different experience. Throughout the summer, we are continuing to work on this project with a publication of our findings as well as policy briefs to support the local women in these areas. This experience is one I will always remember and makes me realize why I want to work in public health. Seeing the injustices these women face makes me understand why public health is so important to supporting marginalized communities, especially those in resource-scarce settings. The privilege we have can make us forget how difficult it is for others around the globe, and this experience will always follow me throughout my public health career.

Aman Kothadia is a sophomore BSPH major and is on the Executive Board of the Public Health Club and the BSPH student representative to LUC Public Health Programs Committee. Aman presented his research at the "Water and Environment Student Talks (WEST) Conference, hosted by the University of British and the presentation was awarded "Best Presentation" in his session.

SAVE THE DATE! The **Parkinson School's Professional Development Workshop Series 2022-2023** is collaborating with the College of Arts & Sciences (Anthropology), the School of Environmental Sustainability, and the School of Social Work to bring a workshop/networking event "Climate Change, Water, & Women's Health in Peru" on **Tuesday, October 4, 2022, 4PM-5:30PM.**

2022 BSPH Graduate Awards

Congratulations to our BSPH graduates who received the following awards at the *Celebration of the Magis* ceremony on May 10, 2022:

Dean's Gold Medallion—**Isabelle Stewart**

Advocacy & Leadership—**Christina Paskon**

Research Excellence—**Sarah Strom**

Spirit of St. Ignatius—**Vinti Bakhshi, Christobal Dominguez, Ananya Pati, Maria Price, and Margaux Whitehead**

Silver Medallion—**Vinti Bakhshi, Christina Paskon, Isabelle Stewart, and Sarah Strom**

Honors Certificates—**Christobal Dominguez and Melissa Madrangca**



Earlier in the spring term, four BSPH students won awards at the LUC Center for Engaged Learning, Teaching, and Scholarship annual awards ceremony. Each student received \$500.00 and a certificate. Congratulations to each of the following students:

Outstanding Undergraduate Research Award

Mikaela Lies

Sarah Strom

Maya Roytman – in absentia

Community Engagement Award

Idiake Irumundomon



Resources

Public Health Resources:

[BSPH Program Students Sakai Site](#),

[Public Health Job Board](#), this site serves to function as a central location for public health job opportunities, internship opportunities, and volunteer events for students and alumni.

[Career Services](#), phone: 773.508.7716, email: careercenter@luc.edu

[Handshake](#), schedule career/pre-health advising & coaching meetings, find jobs, register for career fairs and events.

Librarian for the BSPH Program, Cara Forster, MLIS (they/them), *Research & Learning Librarian*,

cforster1@luc.edu [Public Health Guide](#)

Parkinson Experiential Learning: ParkinsonEXPL@luc.edu

Parkinson Weekly Student Life Newsletter, contact: ParkinsonStudentLife@luc.edu

Student Support Resources:

[Parkinson School of Health Sciences and Public Health Student Handbook 2020-2021](#)

[Student Accessibility Center](#)

[Tutoring Center](#)

[Writing Center](#)

[Wellness Center](#), medical, mental health, and health education professionals committed to your well-being.

[Center for Student Assistance and Advocacy \(CSAA\)](#), an LUC centralized website for reporting student concerns.

Interested in Contributing to the BSPH Newsletter?

We are always looking for new content – and new contributors -- for the BSPH Newsletter. Please let us know about accomplishments we can celebrate, events we can highlight, and topics we can explore. As a newsletter contributor, students may hone their communication skills, share their thoughts, interests, and ideas on a variety of public health topics. Email Keith Kramer, kkramer4@luc.edu.

For more information about the B.S. in Public Health program, please contact:

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