

GLOBAL HEALTH

Middlebury College
Global Health Newsletter
Winter 2023

Greetings,

We are thrilled to share with you the thoughts and experiences of two remarkable individuals connected to Global Health at Middlebury College! We hope that you enjoy reading their perspectives as much as we did interviewing them. Thank you for your time and consideration, as we continue to showcase the Global Health experiential learning and work of Middlebury students, professors and alumni.

Sam Byrne

Assistant Professor of Biology and Global Health

Chris Donohue '24

Mathematics Major and Global Health Minor

Pursuing Global Health after Middlebury

Cassie Kearney ('22)

is a current masters student at University of Michigan, seeking a masters in public health with a concentration in Health Behavior and Health Education. She recently graduated from Middlebury in the Spring of 2022.

Kearney reflected on her freshman year at Middlebury, remembering how lucky she was to have received a reserved spot in a Global Health course, taught by Professor Pam Berenbaum. Before, she didn't really know what global health was. Yet, the course quickly became her favorite. She **loved Pam's teaching** and how interdisciplinary the class was.

Eventually, she decided to enroll in the Global Health minor,

where she took an **interdisciplinary mix of** Environmental Studies, History, and Anthropology classes.

In Kearney's junior fall, she took **Medical Anthropology, with Professor Kristin Bright**. She enjoyed it so much, that she started looking into MPH programs.

Kearney recalled the process of applying, saying that while it was stressful, she confided in Professor Berenbaum to help her make a decision. She started the application process in her senior fall, and had to "grind through" her statement of purpose and supplemental essays. She ended up receiving and accepting an offer at the **University of Michigan School of Public Health**.

Now currently at UMich, she's taking classes such as "Psycho-Social Factors and Psych-Related Behavior," "Intro to Biostatistics," and "Aging and Health Behavior."

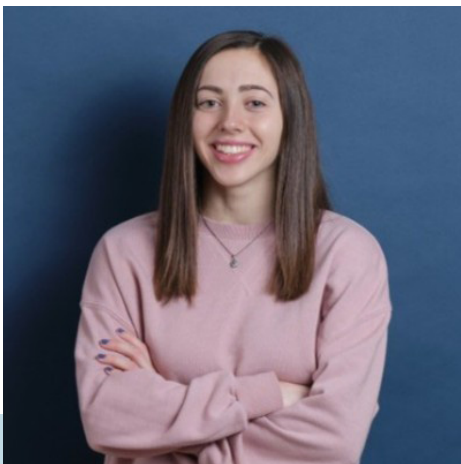
In discussing future career fields, she mentioned that she sees herself working in a career that is hands-on, and directly impacts the communities she's trying to serve. At Middlebury, she took the course **Community Connected Learning**, where she worked with a non-profit called Center for an Agricultural

Economy in Hardwick Vermont. In doing this, she realized her **interest in food systems, and addressing food security issues**.

For students in the global health minor thinking about applying to a master's in public health program, **Kearney advises to "not get too stressed," because Middlebury prepares you well!** While she remarks that it's hard not to "worry about how everything will turn out," she emphasized the importance of trying to fully enjoy senior year.

Another piece of advice Kearney relayed is to get involved with the Middlebury community. She remembered how in undergrad, there was a bit of a suffocating feeling to Sundays, where she felt there was a toxic expectation to have to grind on assignments. While that may in part be required with Middlebury's tough workload, she emphasized **the importance and benefit of giving your body the time to rest**.

Additionally, she says to **take advantage of the research opportunities here at Middlebury**. "There're so many professors who are willing to have conversations," she added, and suggests trying to pick their brains when you can!



Joe Holler

is an Assistant Professor of Geography at Middlebury, who has taught in the department since 2013. Holler instructs Human Geography with GIS (GEOG 120), a popular Global Health methods class. He did not always know that he would be teaching geography, but instead leveraged a liberal arts education to arrive at his current profession.



Pre-Middlebury

Holler attended Ithaca college, initially interested in a combination of computer science and media studies. However, studying abroad on the Semester at Sea program introduced him to a deep interest in becoming “immersed in different global cultures,” and studying “global differences—culturally, economically, and politically.” This led him to tack on a third major, anthropology. Holler remembered wondering, “what do you do with a triple major?” Laughing, he claimed he had absolutely “no clue.” That was until he joined the Peace Corp.

Holler knew that he wanted to leave the U.S. post-graduation, after his time abroad. In the Peace Corp, he instructed math and I.T. at Tanzanian high schools. Again, he was

immersed in a completely different culture, where he learned Swahili.

It was during that time that he “discovered geography.” He met an Agricultural Extension Officer using GIS to map locust outbreaks, and their impacts on crops in the region. He was fascinated—it was the perfect combination of his interests in computer technology and data science, while addressing issues of food insecurity. This light bulb moment encouraged him to look into graduate programs in GIS.

Mapping Social Vulnerability

Professor Holler researches social vulnerability, a term used to describe how certain social groups are disproportionately affected by seemingly random risks such as

natural disasters. For example, he explored the impacts of Hurricane Harvey in 2017, where he used insurance claims from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and Twitter data to assess the impact of the storm. Holler collected Tweets of victims, discussing the impacts of the hurricane, in order to create a storymap of those disproportionately affected by the storm. He is still grappling with how to create a quantitative model that could be validated for other situations. So far, he has not been able to validate these “social vulnerability” indices, as these disasters remain complex, and hard to adapt to other hazardous situations. This experience highlights the difficulty in reducing complex and multifactorial social vulnerability into an easily measurable metric. The consolidation of this analysis into a single metric is “quite difficult,” Holler remarked.

Liberal Arts Education and Global Health

“There are always new, emerging problems,” Holler claims, in the field of global health. These problems’ characteristics and solutions are not already “written in a textbook, ready to be solved.”

Studying Abroad?

Check out these Great Programs for Global Health Minors:

Middlebury School in Chile

- » Course work and practicum experience in a Chilean public health clinic.
- » Access to clinical simulations, with computer-based scenarios and in labs, carried out with a cohort of Chilean students.

Middlebury School in Argentina

- » Public Health track allows students to explore public health within the Argentinian context.
- » Learn about public health and the social determinants of health, incorporating knowledge of Argentine history, and present-day governance.

Denmark: DIS Study Abroad in Scandinavia, Copenhagen

- » Access real-life and current debates within the Danish healthcare system by presenting a semester long research project in collaboration with a Danish public health institution.

Find more information at go/ghstudyabroad

New UVM Accelerated MPH Program

Middlebury College students have the opportunity to further their education and pursue a **Master of Public Health (MPH)** degree through the **University of Vermont's Accelerated MPH program**. Middlebury students can earn an MPH degree by taking courses in the summer before senior year and just one year of additional online study. The program offers courses in areas such as **epidemiology, biostatistics, health advocacy, global health, and food systems**, to name a few. Middlebury students will receive a **reduced tuition cost** for the program, allowing them to complete both their **undergraduate and MPH degrees in approximately five years**. This flexible program is fully online, making it accessible to students who may be traveling or leave Vermont after graduation.



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public.health@uvm.edu

Therefore, learning to be adaptive and invested in “life-long learning” is absolutely essential for the field of global health, Holler says. He adds that health is intertwined with our “political and economic systems, the environment, and even mass-communication systems.” The open-mindedness that comes from a liberal arts education encourages learners to recognize that issues relating to health are deeply complex. Holler stresses that these skills are essential in preparing for emerging global health issues we are destined to face.

Holler emphasized the importance of GIS in the study of disease spread, and as an important tool for studying global health. At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Holler developed an exercise for his GIS class to map the spread of the disease. At that time, risk factors were not clear. Holler hypothesized that young children would be more susceptible to the disease, and subsequently asked students to map out the percentage of population that is children, “presuming that children would be more vulnerable to COVID-19.” Yet, students derived a different story. Instead, Holler exclaimed, the percentage of children in an area was an indicator “that fewer people would have severe outcomes from COVID-19 incidents!” While the exercise disproved Holler’s original hypothesis, the project demonstrates the importance of GIS mapping in the field of global health.

Hopes for the Future

Holler discussed some of his brainstorming course plans for the future. He’s considering teaching a GIS course, specialized for students who have taken an introductory class in R, that would largely be

public health oriented in its applications. That course could be debuted in an upcoming J-term. Additionally, he’s considering teaching an advanced methods Spatial Epidemiology course. Nothing is established yet—nevertheless, it’s exciting to hear about potential opportunities for new global health oriented courses in the future here at Middlebury!

Campus Event Spotlight World AIDS Day: Film Club x GlobeMed x Midd SFOAM

On Sunday, December 4th, three Middlebury student organizations—the **Middlebury Film Club, the GlobeMed chapter at Middlebury, and Midd SFOAM (Student Friends of the Arts Museum)**—came together to recognize World AIDS Day. The event included an hour long screening on a film honoring the HIV/AIDS crisis. To follow, students listened to a World AIDS Day panel of guest speakers. The event includes **one of many events on campus relating to health equity and disease prevention.**