

GLOBAL HEALTH HAPPENINGS

The Middlebury College Global Health Newsletter
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Hello to our alumni, students, and supporters near and far, and congratulations to our latest crop of Global Health minors. This year we are graduating a record number: 8 in February and 18 in May. We wish you success, happiness, and of course, good health. We hope you will stay in touch.



Pictured above is Elizabeth Knup, Class of '82

Alumni Profile: Elizabeth Knup

“My hope for the younger generation is that they stay **youthful and that their passions persist** as they go out into the world that might be different from what they expected,” **Elizabeth Knup**, class of 82’, explained as she advised the current college students who are looking into careers related to **social/economic development and global health**. Knup is currently the Country Director of [Ford Foundation in China](#). In her role, she supervises and oversees a team of 17 members that is responsible for approximately fifteen-million dollars per year in **grant-making** by running operations and managing strategies. In addition, she represents Ford Foundation of China to external stakeholders. Her team and the foundation are committed to **disrupting inequality and advancing social and economic development** to propel a society that is more just and fair in China, where rapid urbanization and economic development have complicated and exacerbated issues of **social inclusion** and **economic security** for many people. They work closely with local leaders, partners, and policy makers to determine how the foundation’s resources can be best used to support equitable economic and social development. The globally oriented, private Ford foundation is headquartered in New York City and approves more than \$500 million dollars in grant-making yearly.

Though Ms. Knup now has tremendous knowledge and experience in civil societies and NGOs in China after

years of living and working there, her initial spark and engagement with China began here at Middlebury College, where she decided to take Chinese without having a clear idea as to what extent this skill would dictate and influence her life and career in the future. She earned her master’s in Chinese studies at the University of Michigan, and went on to work with NGOs, academic institutions, the private sector, and now a global foundation. In recounting these past experiences and variety of sectors she was exposed to over the course of her long career, Knup explained that the work and skills required to successfully manage and navigate the private sectors and NGOs often overlap, **as running a business is largely similar to running an organization**, though they may have completely different objectives. The tasks of management, strategic communication, or financial budgeting, for example, are traits that are necessary for every sector.

The role of NGOs and foundations is quite unique in China, where civil society groups are small compared to the size of the central government. For obvious reasons, many models and frameworks that have shown success in the US or other countries often do not work in the same way in China, where the geopolitical circumstances vastly differ. **In China foundations and NGOs work within the framework of and in relation to the central government.** Furthermore, the concepts of civil society and philanthropy are fairly new ones that have yet to become instilled in the Chinese mindsets and culture. Knup mentioned the **challenges of balancing the inevitable power dynamic** that exists between the granter and the grantee. She admitted that it is important to acknowledge the “privilege of having resources and the power to allocate them for broader social

(Knut profile continued from p. 1)

goods that we all collectively want to achieve.” She stressed the importance of **respecting and having humility for this ecosystem** and relationship, and to maneuver this dynamic constructively and responsibly.

Knut emphasized the need for an **“open mind and open heart,”** especially for members of the younger generation that are yet to embark on their careers and post-college paths. **“Chances are, the world will change and what the world will need in 10 years may not even exist right now,”** Knut explained as she shared how many unexpected opportunities and choices led to each of her career choices. She pointed to the role that her liberal arts experience played in allowing her to be adaptable and flexible. When she graduated from Middlebury, she would not have foreseen that she would embark on a path that crossed multiple sectors, but she emphasized the importance of not closing avenues and being open-minded about opportunities that will arise unexpectedly. She shared her hopes for the soon-to-be graduates to **carry their ideals and values** during this time when many societies, such as China, are reevaluating and questioning values of social justice and civil society. Finally, she expressed her excitement and gratitude about working as the country director at Ford Foundation. **“Every day I meet somebody who is working on an incredibly inspiring project for social development in China. And I am so fortunate that I am able to contribute to their commitment and passion for what they do.”**



Foundations of Global Health

An Interdisciplinary Reader

Peter J. Brown | Svea Closser



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Alumni Profile: Emily Bensen



A recent graduate ('14) who studied anthropology, sociology, French, and global health, **Emily Bensen** currently serves as the **deputy director** of [Hope Through Health](#), based in the **Togolese Republic**, after working in 2014 as their first fellow to help launch and see through the first year of the program through [Princeton in Africa](#). Hope Through Health is a non-profit healthcare organization that provides HIV care and treatment to ensure effective, efficient, community-driven healthcare in Togo, where many of these services were not available previously. Their mission is to **create a world in which high quality health care is available for all individuals regardless of their ability to pay** for the services. They employ community health workers to provide in-home care, and they also refer patients to clinics, while supporting local clinics. In her role as the deputy director, she manages grants and strategic partnerships, and provides programmatic support to the Togo team.

To achieve these desired outcomes and bring about change, Bensen emphasized the importance of communicating the project's core values and mission in an effective and strategic way. **“Instead of wanting to change their good or bad behaviors, we simply work to remove the barriers** that exist for the community members by providing highly trained health workers, so that they have more choices and options that they can choose from for themselves and their children.” So far, her team has observed immense progress within the past few years. They measured a **517% increase** in children receiving care and a **70% reduction** in child mortality in their project sites, which consequently allowed them to develop trust within the community as well as with the central government. **Their goal is to grow and scale nationally** to serve more than **160,000 people in the next 4 years.**

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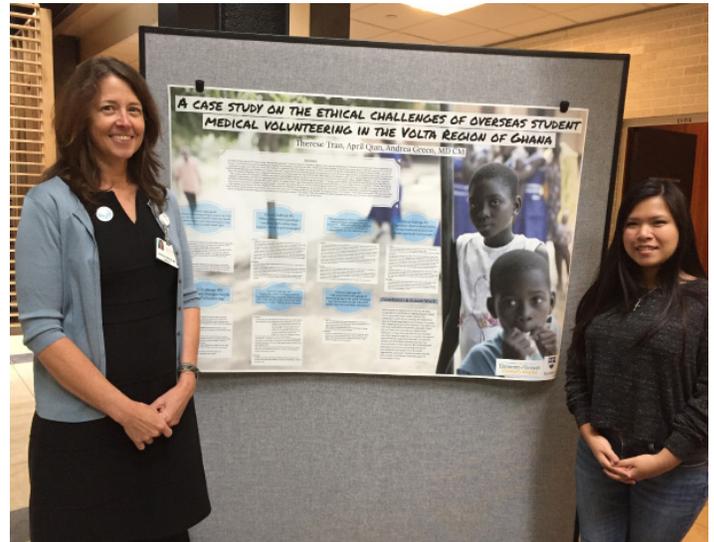
(Bensen profile continued from pg.2)

Reflecting upon her past experiences that led to her current position, she pointed to her liberal arts experience during her time at Middlebury College to be an integral part of her career development, especially her **study abroad experience in Senegal** and the wide range of classes she was able to take as a global health minor. “You can’t think about global health in a vacuum, because it is related to so many different fields and sectors such as politics, geography, climate, religion, and economy.” Bensen emphasized that the interdisciplinary nature of the global health minor provided her the lens and framework to understand and analyze the interconnectedness of the world and the foundations of social justice, human rights, and global health. Despite the richness and importance of academia, Bensen emphasized that one of the most formative experiences in her path to a career in global health was her time abroad in Senegal.

“**Nothing can match experiential learning,**” Bensen said, as she encouraged Middlebury students to pursue similar opportunities that would allow them to leave their comfort zones. She truly valued the opportunity to be personally engaged and situated in the issues and projects of her concern, instead of merely learning or hearing about them. While expressing the importance of widening one’s horizons and working abroad, she also talked about the importance of recognizing global issues that are present near us. “**The reality is that local is part of global, and a lot of important issues are occurring near us here in Vermont as well as every corner of the U.S.**” She encouraged students to think about what kind of issues they can contribute to with their specific backgrounds, skills, and experiences.

She shared that the most meaningful and enriching aspect of her work is the diverse, multicultural, and inspiring leaders and community members with whom she has the privilege to work. She finds great joy and inspiration in the community-led nature of the projects and the various experiences that her coworkers and community leaders bring to her life as well as the work. In her experience, she finds **humility, self-awareness, and being a lifelong learner** to be the most important qualities for becoming an effective change maker and team member in an ever-changing world. When asked about her future plans, she was excited to share her aspirations and hope for the project and organization to grow and build off of the current trajectory of success. She hopes that the organization’s services can extend to more people within Togo.

Student Profiles: ROC Ghana



Therese Tran (right) sharing the poster she created with April Qian and Dr. Andrea Green (left, of the University of Vermont) at UVM’s “Celebration of Global Health” event this spring

During Winter Term 2018, four Middlebury College students traveled with [Vermont’s Refugee Outreach Club](#) (ROC) to **Have and Dzolo Gbogame, Ghana, to participate in the ROC Ghana Healthcare Initiative.** The experience was made possible with internship funding from a generous donor to the Global Health program. The four students -- **April Qian, Therese Tran, Alexis De La Rosa, and Dorjey Sherpa** – earned academic credit for the experience. The students were accompanied by local clinicians (led by Julie Spaniel, DDS), ROC founder **Natalie Meyer 2021.5**, as well as some students from the University of Vermont.

The initiative was designed to adhere to the highest ethical standards. In each town, the group held a formal meeting with the chief of the community to ask permission to conduct the activities. The group obtained consent from patients and performed only tasks that they would be allowed to perform in the United States and that required no follow-up; the focus was health education on topics such as **dental hygiene, treatment for dehydration and diarrhea, menstruation and reproductive health.** The group took care to avoid duplicating locally available services, and made appropriate referrals to local providers in the interest of sustainability and partnership.

The students worked very hard during long, hot days,

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but had an incredible time. They returned with stories of **gratitude** for the things we take for granted, like clean water. They also marveled at the warmth, generosity, and positive outlook of the Ghanaians, and expressed deep appreciation for the chance to learn from the people that they met. Back in Vermont, during the final week of Winter Term, the students shadowed clinicians at Burlington and Middlebury health clinics that serve un- or under-insured people. The students compared the similarities and differences in barriers to health equity experienced by Ghanaians and Vermonters. We are enthusiastic about future collaborations with ROC for experiential learning in global health.

Events on Campus:

This spring the Global Health program focused on social change. We launched our first senior seminar, called Critical Frameworks for Social Change, co-taught by **Professor Jessica Teets** (Political Science) and **Pam Berenbaum** (Global Health). Each student in the class worked on a social change project and shared their work in a poster session on May 10

We were happy to co-sponsor campus visits from two remarkable people:

1) March 14-15: **George Lakey**, recently retired scholar-activist from Swarthmore College, where he was Eugene M. Lang Visiting Professor for Issues in Social Change and managed the [Global Nonviolent Action Database](#) research project. Mr. Lakey gave electrifying talks on campus (in Dana Auditorium and in a combined class that included our senior seminar students and Molly Anderson's food justice students), as well as off-campus.

2) April 18: **Philip Ackerman-Leist**, Professor of Sustainable Agriculture & Food Systems at Green Mountain College, who gave a talk based on his 2017 book *A Precautionary Tale: How One Small Town Banned Pesticides, Preserved its Food Heritage, and Started a Movement*

Our social change focus seemed fitting as the nation marked the 50th anniversary of the assassination of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Announcements:

We have some news to share, news that is sad for us and bittersweet for **Professor Svea Closser**, medical anthropologist in the SOAN department and current academic director of the global health minor. Here is a note from Professor Closser: *“Next January, I’ll be leaving Middlebury and transitioning to a new position at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, where I’ll be working in the Program for Social and Behavioral Interventions in the Department of International Health. While I’m very excited about my new job, I will also deeply miss Middlebury, and would love to stay connected to Middlebury students and alumni. Stay in touch, and please come visit me in Baltimore!”* Professor Closser will be sorely missed by her colleagues and her students. **She introduced many students to the field of global health, inspiring them with her passion, enthusiasm, and top-notch scholarship.** Some lucky students even got to travel internationally with her to assist with field research. Many talented global health professionals today got their start in her classroom. We congratulate Professor Closser on this exciting career move, as well as on the publication of the new textbook that she co-authored with Peter Brown, *Foundations of Global Health: An Interdisciplinary Reader* (Oxford University Press, 2019). **Best wishes, Svea. We’ll miss you!**



Professor Svea Closser (center, in blue) in Ethiopia with her undergraduate research assistants, taking a break from field work to enjoy peanut macchiatos