LOCATED FOR OPPORTUNITY AND POSITIONED FOR SUCCESS

College of Health and Human Services
2017 Annual Report
The College of Health and Human Services (CHHS) is the “health college” of George Mason University.

As the new Dean, I am honored to have the opportunity to work with faculty, staff and students, in support of our mission and professions. I am especially appreciative of the many people who contributed to this report, and I look forward to continued discoveries and academic advances in the coming years.

Sincerely,

Germaine M. Louis
Dean, College of Health and Human Services

By integrating our educational programs, our clinical and community-based research, and our community engagement efforts, CHHS strives to provide a rigorous and innovative learning experience for our students. We are a major provider of the health care workforce in Northern Virginia and produce new knowledge to address critical health and social issues in policy and practice.
Graduate Students Place in National Competition

It might have been their first time on the national stage, but George Mason’s Master of Health Administration (MHA) team brought home a victory. Allison Anderson, Melissa Martin, and Brittany Stone won third place at the University of Alabama Case Competition in Birmingham February 22-24. The Mason team was one of 39 schools in the competition that was designed to give students the opportunity to take what they’ve learned and apply it to an actual situation at a health care organization.

The students were given less than three weeks to research a Baltimore hospital’s complex behavioral health initiative and develop their strategy and recommendations in a compelling PowerPoint presentation. Students drew upon their critical thinking, strategic planning, and executive decision-making coursework, as well as leveraging their presentation skills—all key competencies of the MHA program.

MHA professors encourage students to “think about their thinking” and support a team-based approach to health care. The team used that same approach with the case.

“This was a great culminating experience for me and this program. It gave me the opportunity to use everything I learned from the program and the confidence that this education has prepared me for this kind of work,” Stone said.

This was Mason’s first year in the competition and it was made possible thanks to a donation by a local health care company, The Medical Team.

Josiah Vivero became the first graduate of the Bachelor of Science in Rehabilitation Science.

Nursing was one of the top 5 majors identified for the 2017 academic year.

The 2017 pass rate for the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX) was 95% for both pre-licensure Bachelor’s in Nursing programs.
STUDENT OPPORTUNITIES

Veterans Affairs Will Recruit Mason Students for Diversity in Federal Workforce

In recognition of Mason’s diverse student body and strong health professional programs, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) signed a memorandum of understanding with Mason as part of the Student Outreach and Recruitment (SOAR) initiative.

“We chose to partner with Mason because they are the most diverse university in the commonwealth,” said Georgia Coffey, deputy assistant secretary for the Office of Diversity and Inclusion at the VA. “With the diversity that students bring to Mason, they bring diversity of thought, which is a tremendous asset for us.”

Under this agreement, the VA will work closely with Mason, through the College of Health and Human Services, to recruit students for internships and career opportunities and advise them on the application process. This in turn will help promote diversity and eliminate potential barriers to diverse representation within the VA’s workforce.

Erica Weinard, a senior in the Bachelor of Social Work Program who is researching yoga as a treatment for PTSD, is excited about the possibilities this partnership can provide. After hearing about her grandfather’s experience on D-Day, Weinard decided she wanted to work with the veteran population and advocate for them. “I believe that the veteran population deserves so much more than what they are offered,” she said. “This partnership will allow me to get the proper training and experience that is needed to work with this population.”

“We see this MOU as a first step,” said Germaine Louis, dean of Mason’s College of Health and Human Services. “The college will continue to provide meaningful opportunities for our students to build upon their academic foundation. We hope that our graduates will continue the cycle of mentoring future students so that Mason and agencies can accomplish their missions.”

Social Work Students Get Child Welfare Training and a Stipend

In the fall of 2017, 10 social work students at bachelor’s (BSW) and master’s (MSW) levels paved the way as Mason’s first cohort of the Title IV-E Child Welfare Stipend Program (CWSP). This program is supported by the Virginia Department of Social Services and encourages students to pursue careers in local social service positions after graduation.

CWSP Program Coordinator Katherine Cornejo explained the exciting opportunities that this program offers, including clinical skills training, child welfare field experience, and a discussion seminar for the CWSP cohort to discuss individual experiences. “This semester, CWSP has helped launch multiple gratifying careers in our community.” The program offers eligible students an annual academic stipend of $10,000, as well as extensive training and field experience. For every year the stipend is received, the student must work at a Virginia Department of Social Service agency.
While cigarette consumption in the United States continues to decline, tobacco companies have begun to diversify into alternative tobacco products, such as snus (a moist powder tobacco product), dissolvables, and electronic cigarettes. However, relatively limited research has explored these products.

Dr. Y. Tony Yang, an expert in legal and policy implications related to FDA-regulated products, was selected in July 2017 to further his work by spending a year at the Center for Tobacco Products (CTP) as a FDA Tobacco Regulatory Science Fellowship Program. This nationally competitive fellowship sponsored by the National Academy of Medicine and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's Center for Tobacco Products provides opportunities for mid-career professionals to gain expertise to further define and develop the field of regulatory science as it relates to tobacco products and FDA’s authorities under the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act.

As a fellow, Yang will help research specific projects related to tobacco-product regulation, and actively participate in the development of CTP’s science-based public health strategies. This fellowship will complement his work at Mason where he looks at policies and regulatory issues.

While the health risks posed by alternative tobacco use are in general lower than health risks caused by cigarette smoking, alternative tobacco is addictive and its use is a far cry from safe.

Yang noted, “There are gaps in our knowledge of alternative tobacco products. Public health and the regulatory agencies will be benefited from further research, such as patterns of their uses.”

“Yang will help research specific projects related to tobacco-product regulation, and actively participate in the development of CTP’s science-based public health strategies.”
Fighting Childhood Obesity in Local Latino Communities

“VALÉ (Vidas Activas Familias Saludables): A Multidisciplinary Childhood Obesity Treatment Program for Latino Communities” brings together faculty, staff, and student researchers across the fields of nutrition, psychology, and exercise science to help decrease obesity rates among Latino children. Sina Gallo, an assistant professor in CHHS’s Department of Nutrition and Food Studies leads the project which is funded through a grant from the Potomac Health Foundation through the 2017-2018 Howard L. Greenhouse Large Grant Opportunity.

Latinos experience food insecurity at more than double the rate of the general population, and Latino children are disproportionately affected by obesity. Thus, Latino children bear a double burden of health inequality, having higher risks for both food insecurity and obesity, in an already medically underserved population. However, programs that provide tailored care for Latinos are limited.

VALÉ is trying to bridge that gap. As Gallo explains, “We are training students to work in an interdisciplinary environment to help solve a complicated health care problem, childhood obesity. In addition, we will be providing at-risk children access to an evidence-based, culturally adapted and comprehensive weight management program, which will hopefully help families lead healthier lifestyles.”

VALÉ specifically serves low-income children and their families living in Woodbridge and surrounding areas of Prince William County. VALÉ continues work from a pilot program, “A Multidisciplinary Community Empowerment Approach to Target the Early Treatment of Childhood Obesity among Low Income Latino Children,” which was sponsored by Mason’s Office of the Provost as a 2016 Multidisciplinary Research Initiative.
A Walk in the Park: Surveillance of Ticks

Visitors to the U.S. National Parks are continuing to increase as people seek the views and the health benefits of being in nature. However, there is a greater concern about the ticks, the diseases they carry, and the risk to visitors. Dr. Michael von Fricken and his Mason colleague, Susan Howard, are working as a part of a larger national longitudinal research study examining tick-borne diseases, which is being carried out in collaboration with the National Park Service (NPS) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Surveillance for vector-borne disease risk is currently lacking for most national parks. This research will help to determine the prevalence of infected ticks in recreational areas in our region and to determine the relationship between deer density (adult ticks often feed on deer and amplify tick populations) and prevalence of infected nymphs.

Von Fricken understands the urgency of this work because, “from a public health perspective, surveillance of vector-borne diseases is incredibly important, especially when you consider that cases of reported Lyme disease are increasing at a rapid rate in this region.”

Susan Howard, who has been an NPS volunteer at Great Falls National Park since 2013, has been working on developing a localized One Health plan for park visitors to help protect them while they enjoy the park that she grew up in. She said that this research “will help inform health promotion and risk prevention measures that we would then recommend to park management.”

“From a public health perspective, surveillance of vector-borne diseases is incredibly important.”
In May, the Mason and Partners (MAP) Clinic "cut the gauze" on a new permanent space in Manassas Park. Thanks to a generous grant by the Potomac Health Foundation and the hard work of the many MAP clinic partners, health care services have now be expanded from one to five days a week in Manassas Park.

Over the past two years, School of Nursing professors Caroline Sutter and Rebecca Sutter, and their colleagues have worked tirelessly to bring their vision of an academic-practice partnership to reality. What started off as a room in a community center to provide school physicals for children turned into a clinic capable of treating a range of issues and helping families avoid unnecessary trips to the emergency room.

At the clinic, the Sutters practice interprofessional care and can see anything from acute illnesses, such as allergies, to chronic disease management and behavioral health.

“One of the biggest roles we have is helping with navigation of our health care system,” says Rebecca Sutter. “Its disjointed nature—let alone for the most vulnerable in our community—really requires that high-touch intervention to connect them with partners and resources within the community itself.”
Two hundred forty-six dollars a month seemed like a lot of money to Chris Jones in 1974. That was the amount of the veterans’ stipend he received when he enrolled in college after finishing a six-year stint in the U.S. Army. But just as important as the amount was the fact that the college, San Jose State, gave him a three-month advance on the stipend to cover his living expenses while he started classes.

“I remembered that,” Jones said. “And it made me realize that if I could, I should help other veterans in the same way those folks helped me.”

Twenty-five years later, now in the middle of a successful career, Jones returned to school, earning a master’s degree in 1999 from what is now Mason’s Schar School of Policy and Government. In 2001 he founded ERPi, which provides consulting services to federal clients in the military and health sectors. As a service-disabled veteran himself, Jones put an emphasis on hiring other veterans and assisting their transition to the private sector.

While most veterans are eligible for educational benefits through the Post-9/11 GI Bill, gaps in funding still present challenges, especially for those who juggle education with work and family obligations. In 2012 he established the ERPi Patriot Scholarship fund at Mason, dedicated to helping fellow veterans, especially those who are service-disabled, and their families. The Patriot Scholarship offers $2,500 per semester for educational expenses. Several recipients have also accepted paid internships at ERPi as a result of this partnership.

The program started with two students from the Schar School its first year, but kept growing. In 2017, Jones expanded the scholarship offer to students in CHHS, and for the spring of 2018, more than 20 students at the two schools will receive support.

Honoring General Hazel Johnson-Brown with Scholarships for Nursing Students

Mason embarked on a year-long campaign in 2017 to raise funds to honor General Hazel Johnson-Brown, an esteemed former faculty member. She was best remembered at the university for her instrumental role in founding the Center for Health Policy Research and Ethics—a center within the College of Health and Human Services—as well as for mentoring nursing students through tireless encouragement and support.

General Hazel Johnson-Brown’s legacy extends far beyond the borders of the university. Hazel was the first female African American General in the U.S. military and reached the pinnacle of her military nursing career when she was appointed Chief of the Army Nurse Corps, with the rank of Brigadier General.

To honor her commitment to nursing students, the General Hazel Johnson-Brown Endowed Scholarship Fund and Endowed Nursing Chair Fund have been established in her name. The scholarship fund will benefit high-achieving nursing students with a demonstrated financial need, while the endowed chair fund will help secure innovative, forward-thinking faculty members to educate tomorrow’s nurse leaders.

Donations are still being accepted. If you would like to contribute to the fund and help future nursing students complete their education, visit chhs.gmu.edu/give.

SCHOLARSHIPS

The College of Health and Human Services distributed $237,032 in scholarships in 2017. Thanks to the generosity of our community partners and alumni, these students were able to stay on track paying for their education and completing their degrees on time.

In 2017, several new scholarships were established, including one by a community member and the other as a memorial to a faculty member.