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## *Director's Report - A Reflection on Building and Sustaining Online Graduate Programs*

*by Amy Haddad, PhD*



***Amy M. Haddad, PhD,  
Director of the Center for  
Health Policy & Ethics***

The development of an online graduate degree program should be guided by best practices that include an engaging learning environment, diverse helpful feedback, constructive interaction with faculty and fellow students, and respect for diverse ways of learning. These best practices pervaded the foundational structure of each course in the [Master of Science in Health Care Ethics \(MSHCE\) program](#). As courses are part of a program of study that is “owned” by the entire faculty, none of the courses in the MSCHE program was developed in isolation. In addition, the courses in the program are viewed as a comprehensive program of study, rather than a few core courses with random electives chosen from a variety of academic disciplines. New content builds on previous content because faculty are aware of what is being taught throughout the program.

In addition to content, a continuous aim of CPHE faculty members during the developmental stage of course design was to confirm underlying values such as focusing on learner needs. From the outset, we envisioned our students as “working adults” with varied technology skills. We worked to organize essential content into logical units within an eight-week model that provides many opportunities for interaction. With such advance planning, one would think that all courses would run smoothly and meet the learning outcomes we had hoped to achieve. Of course, this is not the case as we continually learn from our students and each other how to improve our online course offerings. In fact, we have established weekly Graduate Program Committee meetings involving key faculty and staff to critically reflect on student performance, technical glitches, what works and what doesn't work. We also share pleasant surprises, including “aha” moments on the part of students and faculty.

The agenda for the Graduate Program Committee meeting always begins with a “teaching/learning check-in” from those faculty members who are currently teaching. When we have contributed services faculty members from elsewhere on the Creighton campus or outside of the University, we invite them to join us either in person or virtually through a conference call and/or video communication using Skype. Each faculty member takes a moment to situate colleagues in the course, noting key assignments for the week. We talk about insights from students and address questions that may apply to other courses.

The “check-in” part of the meeting is important for several reasons. It is, in a sense, a formal version of helpful hallway conversations that many faculty have with each other in academic settings. However, it isn't a time to complain. It is an opportunity to think aloud through problems and find workable strategies to gain efficiencies and assist students. The check-in also builds better working relationships and mutual support for faculty both here in the Center building and elsewhere. Faculty members state that these check-in sessions reduce the isolation they sometimes feel when teaching a course in an online environment. In other words, the check-in sessions help build and sustain a collective teaching/learning culture.

The rest of the standing agenda for the Graduate Program Committee meetings includes an opportunity to learn about new technology options or instructional design tips from Kate Tworek, Research and Instructional Technologist at the Center. Faculty can also ask about student issues involving technology so that if there are patterns, the problem can be resolved across courses. Finally, the Assistant Director for Graduate Programs, Sarah Lux, reports on issues that affect all the faculty such as mid-term formative evaluations, support services at Creighton for various types of student issues, or updates on admissions and alums. The rest of the meeting is devoted to discussions regarding changes in guidelines, assessment plans, and updates to courses. Since we offer all of the core courses three times a year, there are several opportunities for refinement and fine-tuning. All of these methods of building and sustaining the quality of our MSHCE program are being used to develop the new [Master of Public Health program](#) that will begin in January 2013.

## **American College of Dentists Sponsors New Graduate Elective Course**

**by Jos Welie, PhD, JD**

In the three years since it was launched, CHPE's [Master of Science in Health Care Ethics \(MSHCE\) degree](#) program has attracted students from a wide variety of disciplinary backgrounds. When the discipline was born, "health care ethics" was virtually synonymous with "medical ethics" and indeed, our program still attracts many physicians. Another health profession that is readily associated with health care ethics is nursing. And again, we have been excited to find that our courses are of great interest to nurses. But our student body has always been and continues to be much more diverse. Pharmacists, biomedical researchers, health lawyers, hospital chaplains, respiratory therapists, editors, hospital administrators, and still others have embarked on graduate study with us.

One discipline that has made a rather extraordinary effort to get more of its members enrolled is the profession of dentistry. In our very first class of students, we already had one dentist, Dr. Larry Cook. Upon graduating in 2011, he promptly chronicled his journey in the fall 2011 issue of the *Journal of the American College of Dentists* (online at: <http://acd.org/jacd/JACD-78-3.pdf>). But in the meantime, the American College of Dentists (ACD), which considers as its very mission "to advance excellence, ethics, professionalism, and leadership in dentistry," had already contacted CHPE with an unusual request. The ACD has been very active in dental ethics education for many decades. It offers an array of online dental ethics modules, it publishes educational materials on dental ethics, and it regularly sponsors continuing education courses in dental ethics. But the ACD leadership believed that the time had come to *up the ante* and make available graduate level educational offerings. And so it turned to CHPE.

The final outcome of the negotiations that followed was a brand new elective course entitled "Oral Health Care at the Intersection of Professional and Business Ethics." Though specifically designed with the ethical challenges faced by dentists in mind, the course developers had hoped that the themes would be of interest to a wider audience as well so that the student body would once again be interdisciplinary. The course was offered for the first time in the summer of 2012 and attracted not only dentists but a variety of other health professionals, resulting in ardent discussions, in-depth exchanges, and ample mutual enrichment.

But that was not the end of the ACD's involvement. The College also awarded \$1,000 tuition stipends to ACD Fellows interested in enrolling. In response, six ACD Fellows took it upon themselves to complete this 8-week intensive graduate course. The ACD will once again make up to ten such stipends available for the 2013 offering of this course. For more information on these stipends, please email [saralls@acd.org](mailto:saralls@acd.org).

**Immersion Mission Trip to Guatemala**  
**by Dee Sledge, MA**

I was one of thirty-nine men and women from four states to board a plane in Omaha, NE on June 17, 2012 and fly to Guatemala City for twelve days for a Mission Immersion Trip. It was the tenth *Ixim* Mission with the people of the Archdiocese of Huehuetenango, Guatemala. *Ixim*, which means maize (corn) in the Myan language, is a ministry of solidarity between the dioceses of Omaha and Huehuetenango. We left Omaha not knowing what to expect, but quickly learned what it's like to live and work among the poor and oppressed in San Miguel Acatán. Their language, culture, and religious practices are what separate us, but, paradoxically, brought us together to work, pray, and live in solidarity. The language differences are profound – eight indigenous cultures each with their own language. In the city of San Miguel, the people speak Spanish, Akateko, English, and other dialects. Our daily meetings, projects, and religious services were held with translations in three languages. It was difficult to stay attentive and sometimes frustrating.

We stayed in homes with the families for three nights. It was at these home visits that we learned about extreme poverty, the high level of unemployment, and lack of education and medical care in San Miguel and surrounding towns. The families were excited to show us their way of cooking, doing laundry, and socializing. It amazed me to see all the children eagerly gathering wood for the cooking stove and preparing breakfast for their guests. The families were thankful that we would honor them by spending the night and sharing meals even though the conditions were so primitive. One husband and wife gave up their bed so we would not have to sleep on the dirt floor. Who would have thought that using the outhouse in the dark of night without lights would be so stressful? All three families had erected a Catholic altar in their meager one room home where the entire family prayed together each day. It was evident that God, family, and community were essential in their daily lives.

Our team was divided into three groups: education, medical, and work. It was a joy to be with the people of San Miguel in solidarity, prayer, and work projects that they planned and coordinated. What did I learn on this Mission Immersion Trip? I learned that happiness is not gleaned from owning material things and 'stuff.' I learned that even though the people of San Miguel are living under very difficult and limiting conditions, they have the time and energy for others in their community. I learned that a group of Americans who don't know each other well, can bond and minister to each other during the difficult times that living outside of one's comfort zone in a strange land can bring. I am truly grateful for the gifts of friendship, adventure, and conversion.



**The Mission Group**



**grandmothers (above) & school children (below) of San Miguel Acatan**



## **CHPE welcomes new staff members**

**by Marybeth Goddard, MOL, BSBA**

**Sarah Lux**, MS, Assistant Director of Graduate Programs, comes to CHPE from Iowa Western Community College where she steadily rose through the ranks from Student Assistance Coordinator to, ultimately, Dean of Student Success Programs. As Dean, Sarah's responsibilities included providing leadership to design, implement, and evaluate retention strategies and practices. Sarah holds a Master of Science in Counseling and Student Affairs in Higher Education from the University of Nebraska at Omaha, and is currently pursuing a Doctorate of Philosophy in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies from Iowa State University. As CHPE's Assistant Director of Graduate Programs, Sarah will work with the Center director, program directors, and CHPE faculty and staff to provide program administration, personnel management, and public relations for the Center's online [Master in Health Care Ethics](#) and [Master in Public Health](#) programs. When not working or studying, Sarah enjoys dining out at new restaurants, checking out antique and second-hand stores, attending outdoor concerts, and spending time with family and friends.



**Sarah Lux**

**David Barnum**, BS, Administrative Assistant II for the [Master in Public Health program](#) comes to CHPE from Creighton's Department of Family Medicine where he provided support to the Department Chair and other key administrators. Prior to this position, David held various administrative positions with the Creighton system enabling him to become an expert with regard to internal University processes. In 2008, David was nominated for Creighton's Rookie of the Year, and during 2012 David was elected to the University Staff Advisory Council, a post he will hold for the next three years. Additionally, David is active in Creighton's Wellness Program. David holds a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration from Dana College. As CHPE's Administrative Assistant II for the Master of Public Health program, David will provide support to the program director and faculty and serve as the program's practicum coordinator. David is a busy father of two high-school aged children, and that is where the majority of his free time is concentrated. David is an avid reader, enjoys house projects, and recently restored a 1977 Thunderbird.



**David Barnum**

## ***The Online Master of Public Health Program: Promoting the Health of Communities***

***by Sherry Fontaine, PhD***

The Creighton Online [Master of Public Health](#) (MPH) program integrates the concepts of social justice and health equity in its curriculum and individual courses. By building a comprehensive understanding of the multiple determinants of health, particularly social determinants of health, the program provides students with the tools to advance the health of communities.

Public health as a discipline is continually evolving but is maintaining its core focus on protecting and promoting the health of populations. From its origins in health protection and hygiene to its more recent focus on health promotion and prevention, public health has always been concerned with redressing inequitable social conditions that affect community health. We now understand that to work towards achieving health equity, public health needs to focus on not only the medical interventions that contribute to healthy populations but also on the social, economic, environmental, and political conditions (referred to as the social determinants of health) which play a critical role in determining health status. Public health's focus on the multiple determinants of health is particularly important in meeting the health needs of vulnerable populations where research reports an inverse relationship between health status and socioeconomic status (Blane, 1995).



**[Sherry Fontaine](#), PhD, MRP  
Director and Associate  
Professor, Master of Public  
Health Program**

For the new online Master of Public Health (MPH) program, addressing the health care needs of underserved and vulnerable populations is a fundamental learning outcome of the curriculum and is an area in which we want our graduates to contribute. In designing the Creighton MPH curriculum, the core University and Center for Health Policy and Ethics values of social justice and health equity served as the guiding visions for the program. While the concepts of social justice and health equity are intertwined, there is also a linkage between these concepts and the social determinants of health. Baum and colleagues posited that action on the social determinants of health is a means for health systems to achieve health equity (Baum et al., 2009). The Creighton MPH program integrates the concepts of social justice and health equity in its curriculum and individual courses. By building a comprehensive understanding of the multiple determinants of health, particularly the social determinants of health, the MPH program provides students with the tools to advance the health of communities.

The curriculum of the Creighton MPH program offers a unique, interdisciplinary learning experience. The core curriculum also includes courses in community health assessment and community-based participatory research that reflects the program's community-based focus: building healthy communities for diverse populations. The MPH program offers students the opportunity to concentrate in one of two areas: health policy and ethics or public health services administration. All courses are designed to provide comprehensive understanding of public health theories and public health practice. A practice experience and capstone project will provide students with additional opportunities to link the knowledge they have acquired in the MPH program to actual public health practice. The online MPH program offers students the opportunity to become public health professionals who will affect positive change in the health of the communities they serve.

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**CHPE Faculty Host Lunch during Bioethics Conference**

*by Sarah Lux, MS*

In October, the Center for Health Policy and Ethics hosted a networking luncheon for [MSHCE](#) students, alumni, and guests during the [American Society for Bioethics and Humanities \(ASBH\)](#) annual meeting in Washington, D.C. The annual event provides an opportunity for students, alumni, and guests to network, as well as to meet with CHPE faculty.



**CHPE faculty, students, alumni, and guests meet for lunch during the 2012 ASBH Annual Meeting**



**CHPE faculty, students, and alumni participate in engaging discussion over lunch.**



**Current and former MSHCE students dine with faculty at Bistro Bis during the ASBH 2012 CHPE Luncheon.**

## ***Supporting African American Women with Breast Cancer: What Family, Friends and Health Professionals Need to Know***

***by Amy Haddad and Helen Shew***

Beginning in 2010, CHPE partnered with My Sister's Keeper, a support group for African American breast cancer survivors in Omaha. The initial research study sought to explore the experience of African American women breast cancer survivors relative to received information about treatment options, symptom management, and invitation to participate in clinical trials. As the focus groups in the initial study concluded, there was strong conviction among the participants that their experiences could be helpful to other African American women with breast cancer. CHPE and community partners from My Sister's Keeper sought to develop and disseminate educational materials with these goals in mind:

- Develop culturally appropriate educational resources to assist African American women before, during and after diagnosis and treatment including quality photos featuring African American women in screening, diagnosis and treatment phases
- Utilize appropriate outlets to disseminate educational resources
- Develop and distribute educational materials helpful to health care providers treating African American women with breast cancer.



**Photo reprinted with permission from Living Beyond Breast Cancer. Photographer: Laurie Beck Peterson.**

In the spring of 2012, CHPE received funding for a six month pilot project from the Nebraska Affiliate of Susan G. Komen for the Cure. The project is entitled "What They Need to Know: Culturally Relevant Insights from African American Breast Cancer Survivors for their Friends, Family and Health Professionals" and is aimed at sharing the information brought forth from these focus groups with other African American women with breast cancer and with health care providers who care for African American women with breast cancer.

Partners in the project include Jacqueline L. Hill, MSN, and members of My Sister's Keeper serving as community consultants to the project along with CHPE members, Amy Haddad, John Stone, Beth Furlong and Helen Shew. In late June this group met with Claudia M. Hardy, Susan G. Komen for the Cure African American National Advisory Council and program director of Community Outreach at the University of Alabama Birmingham Comprehensive Cancer Center with the Deep South Network for Cancer Control Program. This meeting helped further define key insights from the focus groups and design of the educational materials to have the most impact. A brochure was determined to be an appropriate tool for sharing this information.

As we were proceeding toward design of the brochure, we learned about an excellent publication entitled "Getting Connected - African Americans Living Beyond Breast Cancer". This booklet is distributed through the non-profit organization Living Beyond Breast Cancer. While most of the community consultants felt "Getting Connected" was an excellent resource, they thought it might be too much information at once for a newly diagnosed woman. With that in mind, 14 members of My Sister's Keeper evaluated the booklet in September, indicating the areas they felt would be most helpful at diagnosis. From this assessment, the major focus areas for a local brochure have been identified as: dealing with the shock of the diagnosis, determining personal motivation for seeking treatment, how to make the best decisions regarding treatment and recovery. We look forward to the final phase of this pilot project – completing the brochure and getting it into the hands of those where it will provide the most benefit.

***Welcome Jeffrey and Phillip Hood!***

An alumnus of our MSHCE program, Jeff Hood, and his wife, Emily, welcomed twin boys in the spring of this year. They named the babies Jeffrey Kyle Hood, III and Phillip Ray Emory Hood.

Congratulations!



**22nd Women and Health Lecture features New York Times best-selling author Tess Gerritsen**

**by Marybeth Goddard, MOL, BSBA**

The Witherspoon Concert Hall within Omaha's Joslyn Art Museum was the venue for the [22nd Women and Health Lecture](#), held Thursday, October 11, 2012, featuring medical suspense and best-selling author, Tess Gerritsen. Although Gerritsen's lecture and Q&A session lasted a little over an hour, it was clear that the audience (numbered at approximately 750) could have listened to Gerritsen for more than double that amount of time.

Gerritsen first explained to the audience the unusual route she took to her writing career. A graduate of Stanford University, Tess went on to medical school at the University of California, San Francisco, where she was awarded her M.D. While on maternity leave from her work as a physician, she began to write fiction. In 1987, her first novel was published. Today, Tess's books have been published in forty countries and more than 25 million copies have been sold around the world. Her most recent, publication, *Last to Die*, is a New York Times bestseller. Additionally, her series of novels featuring homicide detective Jane Rizzoli and medical examiner Maura Isles inspired the TNT television series "Rizzoli and Isles."

During the lecture, Gerritsen detailed to the audience the process she uses to write her books, including the manner in which she researches her book topics. For *Gravity*, Tess's book where Dr. Emma Watson's mission is to study living beings in space, Tess spent two weeks at NASA. When researching *The Keepsake*, a "Rizzoli and Isles" novel about a mummy who is not a rare find but rather a new murder victim, Tess met extensively with Archeologists and Egyptologists to learn about the mummification process.

The evening was a great success. Due to Gerritsen's superior storytelling skills, she was able to mesmerize the audience with her intelligence, creativity, curiosity, and humor.



To learn more about Tess Gerritsen, please visit her website: <http://www.tessgerritsen.com/>

**FOCUS Editor: Amy Haddad, PhD; Associate Editor: Kate Tworek, BA**

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