MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR:

Dear students, staff, faculty, alumni, friends:

Not since World War II has any event held as firm a grip on the entire world for such extended period of time as the current pandemic COVID-19. It affects all our lives, the lives of all people in the world – and in no small way. Our way of life has changed substantially, and very likely will for years to come. As an epidemiology community we are painfully aware that SARS-CoV-2 is here to stay and likely stay for a very long time, decades, and live with us. COVID-19 has reminded us that infectious diseases are still at the heart of epidemiology. While many departments of public health across the country have refocused on the chronic disease epidemics of our times, we have just had a rude awakening that an infectious disease can emerge and threatened the world’s population in a matter of weeks. We may still be at the beginning of this pandemic with many uncertainties remaining. It is our responsibility as an epidemiology community to help shed light on some of these uncertainties and to help curb the epidemic to the best of our abilities. While social distancing and face masks are effective preventive measures, they are not being embraced, adhered to and implemented to the extent necessary. Prevention remains a difficult task, whether it means to convince smokers to stop smoking or to avoid gatherings of crowds during COVID-19. We need to reiterate over and over again how important these measures are to save lives. Another important task is to conduct long-term studies to determine the long-term consequences of SARS-CoV-2 infections. There are suggestions that even infected individuals with milder COVID-19 symptoms may experience long-term multi-organ damage. The shape of the antibody response and the duration of antiviral immunity as well as the prevalence of asymptomatic infected individuals are other unresolved important challenges that need to be addressed with epidemiologic studies. Thanks to all who are involved in research projects and field activities to help address the challenges SARS-CoV-2 is posing. Let’s work with our colleagues from other specialties to bundle expertise and fight this pandemic together. A lot of work lies ahead of us.

Best Wishes,
Karin B. Michels, ScD, PhD
Professor and Chair
Congratulations!

Dr. Marissa Seamans has been awarded one of seven UC-system wide awards for funded access to the OptumLabs database. Her proposal: Utilization of buprenorphine for treatment of opiod use disorder in the United States.

Dr. Nathan Wong was presented with the Albert Nelson Marquis Lifetime Achievement Award for his work and service in cardiovascular disease epidemiology and prevention.

Dr. Julia Heck and MS student Shiraya Thompson received the Alex’s Lemonade Stand Pediatric Oncology Student Training (POST) Fellowship grant to support a summer fellowship.

Dr. Matthew Mimiaga received an R34 from the National Institute of Mental Health for the proposal titled: Developing and Pilot Testing an Adaptive Intervention to Facilitate PrEP Uptake and Maximize PrEP Adherence among At-Risk Transgender Women.

Welcome!

Marisa Vela, MPH
Assistant to the Chair and Academic Personnel Coordinator

Marisa graduated from UCLA and worked with the Psychiatry Department for 4 years before transitioning to the Epidemiology Department in August. She holds an MPH from CSU Northridge, enjoys traveling, and loves spending time with her family, friends and furry pups.

Greetings from the Director of Field Studies (internship)

I would like to acknowledge the dedication and perseverance of the 2020 summer interns; a few had to find new internships and everyone had to work from home. A few interns worked on the current COVID-19 pandemic. I would like to welcome the incoming class, what an interesting time to become an Epidemiologist! When I was studying to become one, few people even knew what an Epidemiologist was. I’m sorry we can’t all meet in person and that it’s going to be harder for you to negotiate grad school on zoom. But I’m glad you’re here and I look forward to working with you. Please make sure you sign up for the internship class at https://ccle.ucla.edu/course/view/EPI%20400%202020. That’s how I will be communicating with you. I can be contacted directly at jbailey@mednet.ucla.edu, and you can book a zoom meeting with me at calendly.com/profjuliabailey.

Best,
Julia Bailey, Ph.D.
A press release was written about Dr. Nathan Wong's published paper showing the significance of coronary calcium deposits in women with diabetes. “Our findings suggest a call-to-action for even more aggressive risk factor management in a woman with diabetes found to have significant levels of coronary calcium to prevent future death from cardiovascular causes,” said Nathan Wong.

Dr. Anne Rimoin continues to be an expert contributor on COVID-19 health-related issues on: MSNBC, Fox News, and CNN. In addition to her national discussion on the COVID-19 pandemic, she is currently leading a study of COVID-19 transmission among the Los Angeles health workforce.

Dr. Timothy Brewer was interviewed by the Los Angeles Times about plans for airlines to provide COVID-19 tests that passengers can take before boarding a flight. “If it’s an accurate test, a good one, it will help,” said Dr. Timothy Brewer.

Dr. Robert Kim-Farley participated on behalf of the UCLA FSPH as a panelist in a special moderated webinar on “COVID-19: What Have We Learned from Other Nations?” on August 13, 2020 as a collaboration between the UCLA Anderson School of Management and the UCLA FSPH.
Dr. Pamina Gorbach is involved in a number of studies on COVID-19 and below are summarized two that she is leading.

Dr. Gorbach leads the Collaborating Consortium of Cohorts Producing NIDA Opportunities (C3PNO) (U24DA044554) a consortium of nine NIDA funded cohorts that address the intersection of substance use and HIV. C3PNO created a compendium of questionnaires to assess COVID-19 in April 2020 to serve as a resource for researchers focusing on substance use and HIV.

In June 2020 Dr. Gorbach’s C3PNO was awarded a grant from NIDA to study COVID-19 related changes in substance use, substance use disorder (SUD) treatment, and HIV prevention and care among highly vulnerable populations followed by the C3PNO cohorts in major cities in North America (Baltimore, Miami, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Vancouver). The purpose was to describe the immediate and longitudinal impacts of the pandemic and its resulting stay-at-home and social/physical distancing orders on the health and well-being of C3PNO participants who include people living with HIV (PLWH) and people who use illicit drugs (PWUD) across North America. Seven of the nine C3PNO cohorts participated in the first survey of the impact of COVID-19. The existing data from the last visit serves as the baseline pre-COVID-19 for comparison to during COVID-19 and includes sociodemographic characteristics, sexual risk behaviors, substance use behaviors, and HIV care and prevention. For the study, a COVID-19 module was developed that is a questionnaire survey to be administered twice, three months apart. The first COVID-19-specific survey was conducted June-August 2020 combined with existing data from the last study visit. A second administration of the survey that will occur in the Fall of 2020 will capture the later stage of the pandemic. The second version of the survey was released the first week of October to the participating cohorts. The preliminary analysis was conducted with 1,414 that represents data from five of the cohorts.

The second COVID-19 specific study being conducted by Dr. Gorbach is a supplement to The mSTUDY: MSM and Substances Cohort at UCLA Linking Infections Noting Effects (MASCULINE or “mSTUDY”), the cohort she leads established in 2013 to follow a cohort of substance-using HIV-positive and high-risk HIV-negative minority MSM. The mSTUDY follows approximately 514 mostly minority MSM with repeated data visits. At least half are active substance users, half HIV-positive, and half younger than age 30. The COVID-19 pandemic is disrupting care and treatment services for people living with HIV (PLWH). These disruptions risk fewer PLWH being virally suppressed – a key HIV outcome - particularly among those who also struggle with substance misuse. We need data to guide the fundamental shift in the way researchers study and intervene with PLWH and use substances during the pandemic. mSTUDY COVID-19 supplement project investigates changes in HIV-transmission dynamics among HIV-positive men who have sex with men (MSM) that correspond with social shutdown for COVID-19 epidemic control. This is important as clinical and scientific resources for managing HIV disease have been repurposed to address COVID-19. The advantage of using mSTUDY is that the cohort has extensive behavioral and biological baseline specimens for 277 MSM living with HIV. We will leverage the platform to measure real time impacts of changes in HIV care services with biomarkers of HIV viral load (HVL) with the objective of evaluating potential transmission from these individuals in HIV outbreaks. HVL will be measured using dried blood spots (DBS) by participants in their home or location. Analyses will test whether HVL among MSM who use drugs increase significantly since the onset of the COVID-19 epidemic. Self-report data collected remotely will assess links between HVL during clinic shutdowns, disruptions in care, changes in drug use and impacts of social change linked with COVID-19 control. This supplement will develop new ways to monitor the HIV progression of substance using young MSM (YMSM) who may represent a reservoir of infection and source for future outbreaks.
Epidemiology Student Association Fall Updates

By: Ryan Assaf & Julia Koerber, ESA Co-Presidents

Message to Students:
ESA welcomes the incoming students for the 2020-2021 school year! As we begin another remote quarter, we would like to acknowledge the obstacles and challenges of the virtual school experience. Nonetheless, we at ESA are committed to our epidemiology student body, as well as to encouraging and cultivating community and an enriched experience for everyone at Fielding.

Sincerely,
Ryan Assaf (rassaf@ucla.edu)
& Julia Koerber (juliajkoerber@g.ucla.edu).

Seminar Series
The Seminar Series works to bring in speakers for seminars on a variety of topics within epidemiology.

First seminar speaker this academic year is Dr. Andrea Kim, Chief Epidemiologist with the LA County Department of Public Health, who will discuss her role in tracking and controlling the spread of COVID-19 in institutes of higher education on October 20th at 12pm. Please look out for emails from the Epidemiology Department advertising how to attend this seminar in the coming weeks.

Mentorship Program
The ESA Mentorship program shares FSPH community resources and opportunities as well as connects incoming Epidemiology students with peers in order to develop personally, academically, and professionally. If you signed up for the Mentorship Program but did not yet receive a match email or you wanted to sign up but didn’t make the deadline, please contact the Mentorship co-chairs Liz and Haesoo at uclaesa@gmail.com. Check out the Mentorship tab of ESA’s CCLE site to access resources such as course planning guides, diversity development, and other useful materials.

Antiracism Task Force
In the continued fight against anti-Blackness and racism, the Fielding Epidemiology Department has formed an Antiracism Task Force committed to this cause. A quote from our mission statement: “As a task force, our mission is to combat racism within our department, school, university, and society more broadly, and to make the UCLA Department of Epidemiology an exemplar anti-racist department. To do this, we seek to promote a more inclusive environment for students, postdocs, staff, and faculty from diverse backgrounds, to incorporate study of racism into the course curriculum, workshops, and seminars, and to support and grow research that addresses systemic racism, structural violence, mass incarceration, policing and related issues as public health crises.”

New ESA Board:
We would like to recognize the new ESA 2020-2021 Board!
- Co-Presidents: Ryan Assaf and Julia Koerber
- VP of Financial Affairs: Victoria Murray
- VP of Doctoral Affairs: Melissa Soohoo and Angie Barrall
- Outreach/Communications: Stephen Ma, Elizabeth Agredano, Lamia Khan, and Weilu Song
- PHSA Liaisons: Jackie Markt Maloney and Nayelie Benitez Santos
- Mentorship Chairs: Elizabeth Chen and Haesoo Kim
- Seminar Series: Pat Arena, Angie Barrall, Nehaa Khadka, and Xinyue Liu
Publications Hot off the Press!