



A Message from the Chair, Dr. Stanley Bernard

As we come close to the end of another calendar year, we should stop for a moment and look back to all that has transpired. The last few years have been harrowing to say the least. As a nation, we survived a pandemic and an insurrection. As a society, we tumbled backward away from women's right to privacy and waxed and waned on the issue of whether black lives truly matter. As a world, we have even officially overpopulated the planet, reaching the 8 billion mark just a few weeks prior to this writing. At the same time, we have to look forward to all the possibilities that lay before us.

Yes, we cannot pause when there is still work to be done. We are making the transition back to campus and to a shiny new edifice which is the Health and Human Services building. We are renewing our commitment to the public's health by inaugurating a new vision and polishing up our mission. We are moving bravely into the unknown with renewed vigor and enthusiasm. Truly, **our hope** is in our students and our perseverance is in our faculty.

In the pages of the current edition of PH Connections, you will see how we have renewed our commitments and, despite all that has transpired, are unafraid of the nebulous future. In this edition, you will see all of the great things that we have accomplish in the past few months despite the setbacks of the past years. Our students are brighter, more committed, more willing to take chances to ensure **equitable, healthy, and thriving communities for all** and uplift society more than ever before. We will foster that energy as we strive to accomplish this envisioned future. The faculty in the Department of Public Health at SCSU will partner with our students and community **to advance the state of public health practice toward social justice through education, community service, research, and the pursuit of health equity.**

On a final note, I wish to send love and blessings out to all those who have lost someone during these trying times. I know personally how we have lost many loved ones and have cried many tears. From our public health family, the most recent was the rock that held the public health department together for many years, Michele Mann. Michelle was not just a secretary who sat at the front desk to welcome visitors or to make copies for faculty. She was the backbone, the central nervous system that all things went through in the department. She was our institutional history, working at the department for 25 years. She knew where every pencil, pen, and paperclip belonged and made sure they were put there at the end of the day. She planned every outing and mentored every student worker; one of which was my own daughter. We will surely miss Michelle and pray that she continues to guide and watch over us wherever her soul may rest.



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Our New Podcast

Our department is proud to announce the start of our new podcast, Public Health Connections. Each episode will focus on a different aspect of public health. Be sure to watch for announcements as episodes drop. You will be able to subscribe wherever you listen to podcasts. Episodes will be driven by students interviewing leaders in public health.

publichealthconnections.podbean.com



Special thanks to: Michael Bay, Communications; Ken Sweeten, Athletics; Allison O'Leary, Integrated Communications and Marketing; Frank Strona, MPH, PhD(c); Arden Castle, CHES
Your guidance and support has been monumental in helping us get this far!

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When the Surgeon General Came to Town



U.S. Surgeon General, Dr. Vivek Murthy, moderated a student panel at SCSU on mental health and social connections this September. Students from surrounding universities came to listen to the Surgeon General and their cohorts from Gateway Community College, University of New Haven, Yale University, and Southern Connecticut State University. Dr. Murthy listened to students talk about the need for community and spoke about technology opportunities for connections specifically for those who are experiencing mental health crisis. Gov. Ned Lamont was also in attendance.

Elizabeth Schwartz

I was able to sit down with Professor Elizabeth Schwartz recently for the department podcast and learn a bit more about the work that she is doing as the new President of the Connecticut Public Health Association and throughout Connecticut. Professor Schwartz teaches public health here at Southern and works with CARE in vaccine outreach. Elizabeth notes that she, "dreams of living in a world scripted by Aaron Sorkin and scored by upbeat, one-hit wonders; where everyone has access to outstanding healthcare and exceptional public education. In her free time, she is an avid baker, photographer, and escape room enthusiast. She has an incurable case of wanderlust."

I was overjoyed to hear that Elizabeth is putting forth her agenda when she assumes the role of CPHA President in January and including public health communication. Elizabeth shared that she hopes to give those in public health practice the skill sets to communicate that their work is truly for everyone.

As I'm looking forward to graduating next semester, I asked Elizabeth for some words of wisdom for those of us about to go forth into the world. I found comfort when she reminded me to be aware of the stress that occurs in these last few months and to note how that is influencing me, rather than reacting out of that stress. She also said that networking was vital for those of us looking forward to step into our new careers. Elizabeth reminded me to make meaningful connections and not to only think about what I need from a relationship, but also what I can bring and remember that I now have skills and knowledge to share.

For me, being reminded that this is an opportunity for me to consider what do I *want* to do and as Elizabeth pointed out "what brings you joy" was encouraging. Professor Schwartz added that taking time to pursue a career where joy and excitement are found is certainly a privilege, but now is the time to consider that and seek out avenues and support for those career desires, rather than perpetuating taking a position to pay the bills whilst being unfulfilled or unhappy in that work.

We also chatted about the excitement of teaching. Unsurprisingly, empowerment was a theme that ran through our conversation and Professor Schwartz spoke about not only the spark that occurs and during the learning process, but how students take public health knowledge and reinvest it back into their communities. For Elizabeth, the importance of students not only gain knowledge, but also "leave the classroom...and make choices that impact the world."

Each podcast episode, I invite guests to share their "Public Health Hero" with listeners. Professor Schwartz understood this assignment. She note that the term hero carries a lot of ideas with it ("the dude who jumps on a grenade for his bros" or "the white person who goes into the developing country to bring them knowledge and medication"), but often removes others from the realm of doing the work. Heroism leads to "exceptionalism". "Herosim is about taking a role that is broken, and doing what you can to put it right, even in ways that are not dramatic."

To hear all of our conversation, listen to our podcast, Public Health Connections. You can also find Elizabeth and her work at CPHA.info.

CPHA

The Connecticut Public Health Association's Annual Conference was once again in person. We met this November at the Aqua Turf Club in Southington. The theme this year was "Where do we go from here?" Attendees listened to presentations ranging COVID-19 to equity to community building. Students were encouraged to participate in a speed mentoring session led by Dr. Deb Risisky. Many SCSU alumni were on hand leading sessions and everyone was excited for alum and professor Elizabeth Schwartz being the CPHA President-Elect.



Dr. Jean Breny presented with Breanna De Leon and Maya Welfare on "Using Community-Based Photovoice Research to Explore Inequities Exacerbated by COVID-19."

Alum, Caitlin Daikus shared insights on "Special Olympics role in increasing equitable access to healthcare and services for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities."

Dr. Jean Breny and Marcelin Joseph with David Robledo and Desiree Rondeau presented "Exploring A Community-Based Approach to Understanding and Promoting Safer Sex Behaviours Among Male College Students"

APHA

Faculty, Alumni, and Current Students alighted in Boston this November for the American Public Health Association's Annual Meeting and Expo. It was also the 150th anniversary of the APHA. Attendees learned, not only about how to create a healthier world, but also about the APHA's history and the acknowledgement of racism and prejudices within public health and health sciences throughout the past 150 years.

The theme of the conference was "150 Years of Creating the Healthiest Nation: Leading the Path Toward Equity." Events, speakers, posters, and themed sessions centered around equity in public health. Southern faculty, alumni, and students were presenters throughout the conference.



- Jean Breny and Olivia Micca, Amanda Audette, Aaliyah Barnes, Emily Ent, Shelby Segala - 5149: The COVID-19 Experience: Through the Lens of Public Health Workers
- Jean Breny (Moderating) - 4141: Violence Against Women and Girls (Oral Session organized by Women's Caucus)
- Anuli Njoku (Oral Presentation) - 2112: Pharmaceutical Waste and Environmental Injustice: Challenges and Considerations



- Deb Risisky, Nicole Batista (SCSU) & Tara Lutz (UCONN) - ECP Poster Session 1: Utilizing opportunities to foster leadership and build capacity: how a public health internship founded a statewide professional organization in Connecticut
- Sofia I. Morales (Yale, SCSU, CARE), Genesis Vicente (SCSU, CARE), Elyse VanderWoude (Yale), Leslie Brown (CARE), Rafael Pérez-Escamilla (Yale), Kathleen O'Connor Duffany (Yale), Elizabeth C. Rhodes (Emory) - 2079 How Latina women mitigate negative breastfeeding care experiences and its implications for healthcare quality: A qualitative study



- Heidi McBriarty - 4009: Policy Gap Analysis Regarding Equitable Access to Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) for Youth in Connecticut



APHA 2022
ANNUAL MEETING & EXPO
BOSTON | NOV. 6-9

150 YEARS OF CREATING THE HEALTHIEST NATION.
LEADING THE PATH TOWARD EQUITY.

ENGAGE, COLLABORATE, GROW



APHA



MPH Students, Oliva Micca and Emily Ent presented the research they completed with Amanda Audette, Aaliyah Barnes and Shelby Segala with Dr. Breny.



Today with Dr. Bernard at APHA Developing, Funding, and Strengthening the Capacity of Community-Based Participatory Research Projects session. – Fatawu Mahama



Dr. Anuli Njoku took a break to stop by the SCSU booth with Dr. Bernard and Dr. Evans.

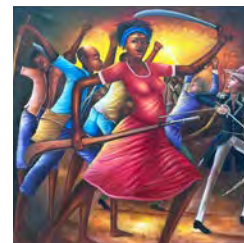
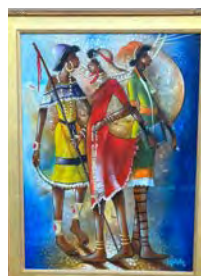
As a first time attendee of APHA, I was in awe of how present Southern alumni, faculty, and students were. I was impressed to see faculty and alumni were involved in APHA's organization. The research Owls are doing is impactful, not only here in Connecticut, but nationwide.

Attending large conferences can be a bit overwhelming at first. I've learned, over the years, that I won't be able to attend every session that I want to or see each booth or attend each party.

Technology makes it easier not to have FOMO though. Sessions are recorded so that attendees can watch when on their own time and social media, like Linked In, ensure that virtual connections can still be made. I suggest picking one or two themes to follow throughout a conference, rather than trying to take it all in. Similar sessions are usually held in one area of facilities and relationship building is easier for all when you make multiple connections.

Don't forget to plan for downtime. I found a quiet area, in a sea of 13,000 people, to grab a bite to eat, rest my tootsies, and reflect on what I had learned.

And sometime, you find surprises that pull you in when you least expect it. I found the art in the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center to be one of my highlights. Haitian artist Eddy Tintin shares stories of Haiti in his vibrant work. – Rebecca Stearns



Season Greetings –

It's been a few tough years for us folks in public health, but our workforce has proven to be resilient. There have been many lessons learned and unexpected opportunities that have emerged from the pandemic. Most important to our local health department are the many interns that have served with us in a variety of roles over the past few years/decade – public health education & nursing, environmental health, and maternal child health – a sincere thank you!

The East Shore District Health Department (ESDHD) also has a strong partnership with our local universities and utilizes this collaboration to further improve practical public health policies for the betterment of our communities through research-based science. ESDHD prides itself as a research-based local health agency as our roots as a professional discipline are grounded in science – we are the local, boots-on-the-ground scientists.

Recently, we were published in the American Journal of Public Health, where many of our students from different higher educational institutions assisted us over the course of 5 years, including SCSU public health students.

AJPH link: <https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/10.2105/AJPH.2022.306943>

We also received the National 2022 SOBA President's Award for our solar-electric pump-out vessel, again, many thanks to the SCSU students who worked on this 4-year project:

Read more here: <https://www.zip06.com/news/20220916/esdhds-solar-shark-wins-soba-award/>

We also wanted to let our public health academic friends know our agency is recruiting – we are seeking two driven, highly motivated persons for the position of Environmental Health Specialists, A.K.A. Health Inspectors/Sanitarian.

Here is the link: <https://www.esdhd.org/node/123>

We are always looking for public health **interns:** <https://www.esdhd.org/node/184>

Have a healthy holiday season.

Sincerely,

The ESDHD Team



Have you stopped by our new office in the College of Health and Human Services?

It's a wonderful, encouraging environment where you can make connections, find a quiet place to study, or read research and gain ideas for your own work.



SOPHE Advocacy Summit

Cheryl Palmer and Olivia Micca, MPH students, attended the SOPHE Advocacy Summit in Washington, DC this October. The theme of the 24th annual summit was "Youth Health Equity: Forging the Path for an Inclusive Future." Both Cheryl and Olivia learned about the unique health needs of marginalized youth and how to advocate as a public health practitioner.

Chery reflected: *"I really enjoyed the SOPHE conference in Washington, DC. The keynote speaker: Daphne Frias, was both powerful and insightful with a wealth of information. It was great meeting people from all over the country and exchanging thoughts, and experiences. I learned a lot. The visit to the Capitol was awesome. When sharing my thoughts about the issues of the world such as race and gender, inequities and inequalities, and social disparities, I felt that my personal values were received well and that my input was going to make a significant contribution for change."*



Cheryl Palmer and Olivia Micca

Southern Students at DESK



left to right, Lauren McCall, Angela Corsino, DESK volunteer coordinator Ashley Burkell, Wendy Batterton



Lauren McCall

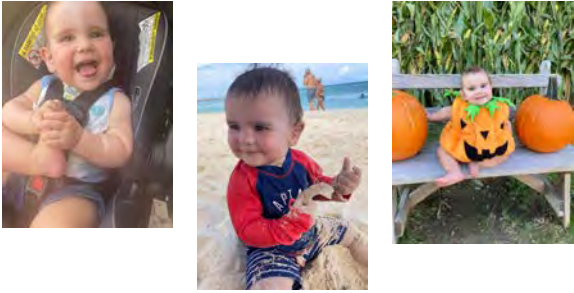
Lauren shared: *"My experience at DESK was wonderful. It felt so amazing to give back to the local community and help those who need it most. The people who worked for DESK and Loaves & Fishes were absolutely wonderful shining lights that helped run the pantry to be as smooth as possible. I could see the amount of care put into making the pantry happen and I am so grateful I got to be a part of it. The community was very grateful, and it was so rewarding. DESK didn't ask for much, just some of my time and energy to help those who need it, and I am so glad I volunteered to do so. I hope we made someone's day and eased their burden and that more people get inspired to give back to those who need it most."*

Congratulations to Adjunct Christine Gilchrist, MS MPH RN NC-BC and Ph.D. Nursing Candidate, The Graduate Center of the City University of New York!

In November, Christine was selected by Sigma Theta Tau International Honor Society of Nursing, Alpha Phi Chapter, to receive their \$2,000 research grant. Her doctoral research is a secondary analysis of the fall 2021 American College Health Association-National College Health Assessment and examines "Social Identities and Sense of Belonging/Campus Climate as Predictors of Flourishing Among College Students."

To learn more about the Downtown Evening Soup Kitchen visit [DESKCT.org](https://www.deskct.org) and to volunteer, e-mail Alumn [Ashley Burkell](mailto:Ashley.Burkell@deskct.org), BS '21 DESK's Volunteer Coordinator.

A bit of joy from Alum Becky Pejinsky



*Alum Suzanne Blancgflor and
this Editor, Rebecca Stearns*



Rebecca Stearns shared: "Suzanne was my Public Health Policy professor at Eastern. Her leadership and mentorship spurred me on to study at Southern. We've become friends and I recently invited Suzanne to come and preach at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Windham Center, where I serve as Senior Warden."

Dr. Anuli Njoku

Peer-Reviewed Conference Presentations

- Njoku, A. (2022). Afro-Brazilian Spiritual Belief Systems to Address Racial Disparities in Sickle Cell Disease among Black Brazilians. Oral presentation, XIII Congresso Internacional Artefatos Cultura Negra, Universidade Regional Do Cariri – URCA Crato and Universidade Federal Do Cariri (UFCA) – Faculdade de Medicina (Famed) Campus Barbalha, September 21 and 23, 2022, Juazeiro do Norte – Ceará, Brazil.
- Njoku, A., & Bernard S. (2022). Afro-Brazilian Spiritual Belief Systems to Address Racial Disparities in Sickle Cell Disease among Black Brazilians. Oral presentation, XIII Congresso Internacional Artefatos Cultura Negra, Universidade Regional Do Cariri – URCA Crato and Universidade Federal Do Cariri (UFCA) – Faculdade de Medicina (Famed) Campus Barbalha, September 21 and 23, 2022, Juazeiro do Norte – Ceará, Brazil.
- Njoku, A., & Evans, M. (2022). Black Women Administrators and Faculty Perspectives and Strategies during COVID-19 and Unrest. Oral presentation, Creating Antiracist Solutions: Our Stories, Our Narratives, Our Collective Healing, Sacred Heart University, Fairfield, CT, August 10, 2022.
- Njoku, A. (2022). Teaching about Diversity, Cultural Competence, and Health Equity in Online Public Health Courses. Oral presentation, 22nd International Conference on Diversity in Organizations, Communities, and Nations, June 2, 2022, Willemstad, Curacao.

Keynote

- Njoku, A. The Impact of COVID-19 on Health Educators and the Future Workforce. Panel Speaker, APHA Public Health Education and Health Promotion (PHEHP) webinar, September 12, 2022. (153 attendees).

Three accepted book chapters

- Njoku, A., & Joseph, M. (in press). COVID-19 and environmental racism. In P. Liamputtong (Ed.), Handbook of social sciences and global public health. Springer.
- Njoku, A., & Sampson, N. (in press). Environment injustice and public health. In P. Liamputtong (Ed.), Handbook of social sciences and global public health. Springer.
- Wakeel, F., & Njoku, A. (in press). Environmental health disparities and maternal and child health: The lifecourse approach. In P. Liamputtong (Ed.), Handbook of social sciences and global public health. Springer.

Hamden Partnership for Young Children Annual Breakfast Meeting

On November 17, 2022, Dr. Anuli Njoku, Associate Professor in the Department of Public Health at Southern Connecticut State University delivered a keynote address at the Hamden Partnership for Young Children's Annual Breakfast Meeting. In her role as Hamden Parent Ambassador, Dr. Njoku delivered a keynote address on "Social Determinants of Health: Role of Early Childhood Development and Education". The meeting was well-attended and included a gathering with community partners, representatives from the Town of Hamden, Hamden Public Schools, the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, childcare staff, Hamden parents and friends of the Hamden's Partnership for Young Children. Also in attendance at the meeting was the Mayor of Hamden, Lauren Garrett, see in the attached picture with Dr. Njoku. Hamden's Partnership for Young Children (The Partnership) is an independent collaborative that includes public and private agencies, community members and representatives from the town of Hamden and Hamden Public Schools who advocate for Hamden's young children. The focus of the Partnership is improving the education, care, health, and safety of children from birth to age nine. The Partnership works with a wide range of programs, departments, and schools that support young children and their families to help create a coordinated, integrated system with accountability by all.



Four Public Health students (undergraduate student Janaya Laude and graduate students Marcelin Joseph, Martin Agbalenyo and Rochelle Felix) received student awards from the Multicultural Center's *Multicultural Explosion: An Evening of Grit, Perseverance and Success* on November 29, 2022. The ceremony was an effort to connect students with networking opportunities and celebrate their success.



Advisor Dr. Njoku with award winners, panelists, moderators, staff, and other advisors



Advisor Dr. Njoku with award winners - Janaya Laude, Marcelin Joseph (MJ), Martin Agbalenyo, and Rochelle Felix

Dr. Jean Breny, MPH

Peer Reviewed Published Journal Articles

- Breny, J. & McMorrow, S. (2022). Research Engagement in a Virtual World: Strategies for Maintaining the Power and Impact of Photovoice Research Online. *Health Promotion Practice*.
- *Diaz, V.R., Albritton, A., Katague. M., Breny, JM, & Kershaw, T. (2022). We Are Family: Effects of a Relationship-Strengthening Intervention on Parenting Behaviors among Black and Latino Adolescent Couples. *Journal of Family Issues*, Vol. 0(0) 1–21.

Book Chapters

- *Breny, J., De Leon, B., & Schwartz, E. (2022). Partnerships and Community Building for Advocacy. In, Rees, K., Early, J. O., & Hampton, C. (Eds.) *Be the Change: Putting health advocacy, policy and community organization into practice in public health education*. Oxford University Press.
- Valdez-Barkwell, CM, Breny, J., Fagan, M., & Roe, K. (2022). Implementation Tools, Program Staff, and Budgets. In, Fertman, C. & Grim, M. (Eds.) *Health Promotion Program Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation: A Practitioner's Guide* (3rd ed.). Wiley Publishing. ISBN: 978-1-119-77088-6

Invited Panel

- Halkitis, P., Bowman, D., Breny, J. & St. George, DM. Advancing the Journey to Achieve Health Equity and Eliminate Discrimination in Academic Public Health. Association of Schools and Programs in Public Health (ASPPH) Annual Meeting, March, 2022.

Presentations at Professional Meetings (Peer-Reviewed)

- Breny, J. & McMorrow, S. Let's Talk About Photovoice! Lunch roundtable at International Union of Health Promotion and Education (IUHPE) Annual Conference, May 2022.

Affiliate Researcher at the Boston University Center for Anti-Racist Research.

Dr. Deb Risisky and Alumni Erin Duff, MPH Jacquelyn Espinet, BS

- Risisky, D., Duff, E., Espinet, J. College Students' Perceptions on Safety Measures and Campus Engagement During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Journal of American College Health*, Nov, 2022.



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