

Celebrating 50 Years of UC Berkeley's MCP+MPH Program!

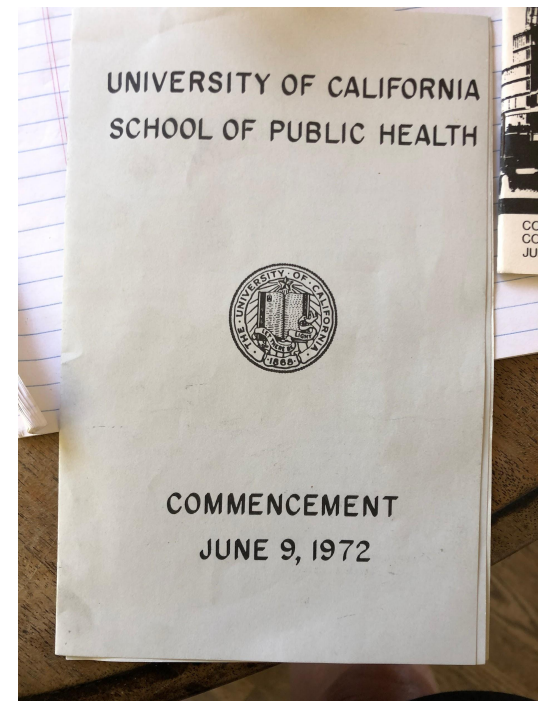
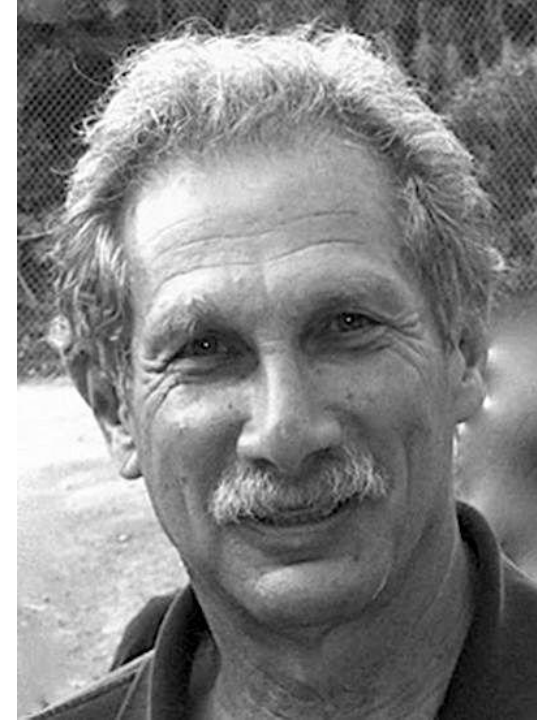
Alumni & Community Stories

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“And so the city planners said, Oh, man, if we can just join with the white coats, then we'll get some legitimacy....So you had both sides, looking for greater legitimacy, thinking that the other side would have more legitimacy, not realizing each of them had this own self perception, that we don't have power and authority. All these things coming together sort of led to the joint masters program.”

-Goldman School of Public Policy Profesor **Dan Lindheim** reflecting on his memories of the early days of the program.Lindheim was one of the three people who made up very first class of MCP/MPH students in 1972. Bottom right, Lindheim’s commencement program.





“One of the things that I think is most useful about the [MCP MPH] program and the joint way of looking at the world.. is that an integrated perspective can really put meat on the bones of the social determinants of health conversation. It can help turn a description of social ill into a practice of addressing it.”

-Elke Davisonson, MCP MPH 1994. Elke is an independent planning and health consultant in Atlanta, Georgia and was Jackson, Miss.’s first senior planner for affordable housing and developed their first housing element for the comprehensive plan.

“I loved the interdisciplinary multidisciplinary approach...It was a wonderful experience because I was able to go to Dr. Duhl’s home and he would have all these notable people that you've read books about, all these people would come in and we’d just be able to have chats. I thought it was just wonderful for a kid in East LA to be able to have that access... did a lot of international work working closely with [Professor Len] Duhl...He was a great storyteller.”

-**Rene Santiago**, Class of 1987. Rene is *Deputy County Executive for the Santa Clara County and Director, Santa Clara Valley Health and Hospital System, San Jose, CA*



“I think the Berkeley program is really unique because of exactly where it's situated in the Bay Area. We have an amazing community right at our doorstep that has a lot of knowledge at the forefront of conversation around equity. For me it was so important to have access to a community that looks similar to mine.....I don't know if I would be as passionate or if I would have even been able, as a Latina, a daughter of immigrants who grew up in an urban center, if I didn't have like something similar that I could go to, that I could find refuge in, and that would make my studies meaningful.”

-Mar Velez, Class of 2015. Mar is Senior State Policy Director for Latino Coalition for a Healthy California, and a former Congressional Aide for the Office of Congresswoman Barbara Lee.





*“I work almost exclusively in public health and the public health degree has been hugely professionally important. So I'm very glad I added it to my city planning studies. **But the degrees really complement each other.** The public health degree was useful for the facts I learned and the concepts I learned, and the city planning degree...taught me data analysis and really improved my writing skills and my analytical skills.”*

-Merrill Buice, Class of 1995. Merrill is Director of Health Care Coverage & Access, San Francisco Community Clinic Consortium, San Francisco, CA. Though she says she works “squarely in public health” she is excited that that she is able to incorporate more work on social determinants of health into her work - especially around transportation and housing issues. Above, CED Library and studio spaces.



“To realize the potential of a stronger linkage between the public health world and the urban world, it's going to require more conscious efforts to overcome these barriers that keep the public health people and the urban planners and architects and other designers from working together. I think that that would be the best possible monument to what Len Duhl cared about. I bet from where he is now that Len wishes he could be in the middle of helping to stir things up and make things happen. But now it'll have to be done by others.”

-**Michael Woo**, MCP '75, was an advisee of Prof. Duhl. While Woo did not pursue an MPH while at Berkeley, he says he was exposed to Duhl's early ideas about health and cities, which influenced Woo's later work. Woo is former dean of the College of Environmental Design at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, a former Los Angeles City Councilmember and planning commission member, among other accomplishments.

“The program is unique because it is made of these two really good programs of public health and city planning. And by being in the interdisciplinary program...you're able to see solutions that other people may not see. A lot of the students I had that go in the program are very talented already. So I think being exposed to so many different classes in two different fields, it gives you a good background for attacking problems.”

-Michael Santero, Class of 1998. Michael is director of asset management for First Community Housing, nonprofit affordable housing developer based in San Jose. He says with his recent focus around homelessness he has been able to pull more on his public health background. Michael remembers his grad school experience as very self-directed, with a limited “cohort” feeling due to the small number of students pursuing both degrees.



“I chose Berkeley’s MCP MPH program because of its focus on health inequities. The dual degree seminar that we had to take each semester was an eye-opener in many ways. I learned a lot from the cohort of dualies, faculty, alumni and guest speakers. My most memorable class is when we had a chat with guests from Advance Peace in Richmond CA, a partnership with the police department that is dedicated to ending cyclical and retaliatory gun violence in disadvantaged neighborhoods. At the time, I was working with a similar community in Nairobi that was finding it difficult to address youth delinquency and mass incarceration. I captured a lot of lessons that were relevant for the community in Nairobi.”

-Sarah Lebu, Class of 2020. Sarah is currently Data Manager, HIV/AIDs and Mobility Research Study, UCSF and will begin her PhD in Environmental Sciences and Engineering at the University of North Carolina’s School of Public Health in Fall 2021.





*“When I started at Berkeley, I started in public health administration... **I’m originally from Guatemala, and I really wanted to go back home and use the skills that I was going to use in public health.** We have in Guatemala a really poor health system which is not really effective and very equitable. And so my objective was to study that and go back, but when I was there, I [learned about] the program for city planning. And also with the interest of really going back, and using some of those skills... is why I chose those two careers. I ended up not going back, but I still use many of those skills that I learned in the work that I do now.”*

-Perla Barrientos, Class of 1995. Perla is Senior Program Manager, PG&E, where she manages various community programs.

“I’m always a public health person at heart, because that’s where most of my work experience is. Well, actually, that’s not true anymore! But that’s where most of my orientation lies. Having that orientation is really important in terms of: can we promote better health outcomes for communities? Without having that as my end goal, just working on pure transportation projects, that lens can get lost. A lot of transportation planners only think the outcome is to build a project, to design a project, without really thinking more about the context in which that project is being delivered and who it affects. Even now that I’m in a squarely planner-type position, I do think that it should be so much more about health. There’s a lot of room for the work to evolve. For example now I’m working on a project to integrate environmental justice in the general plan, which is actually a project where I get to use both my hats. I think planning is slowly moving towards the direction where we’re [thinking] more holistically about not just the built environment, but also our living environments, social and physical.”



-Celina Chan, Class of 2015. Celina is Planner at the San Francisco Planning department, where she is focused on ConnectSF, the City’s multi-agency long range transportation planning program.

“Health is a human right. Yet health inequities persist. As urbanization continues, decision-makers need to have the proper tools and skillsets to be able to pinpoint and mitigate the many factors that lead to the creation and perpetuation of health inequities. I believe that training in both public health and city planning provides a more holistic understanding of how to address these issues. We cannot build healthy cities without first understanding the factors that impact health.”

-Jessie Jaeger, Class of 2020. Jessie is an Analyst at PSE Health Energy, where she supports the organization’s work on air pollution, health equity and community resilience to climate change.



“Berkeley is always where my heart is - the friends I met, the professors, that collegiality, the studying up at Cafe Strada....The curriculum has professors with the global experience and experience in the United States that really makes it unique. We were so ahead of the curve that universities all across the country then have copied that.”

-Karen Nikolai, Class of 1994. Karen is Health Domain Team Lead for Disparity Reduction at Hennepin County, St. Paul, MO. While she was at Berkeley she assisted Prof. Duhl in planning the 1992 International Healthy Cities Conference held in San Francisco.





*“I loved that you could pick and choose the best of each world and then find where your niche is.... Now, I love being able to understand the connections between all these things. **I love doing that in my work, being able to point out for people the things they don't recognize that impact people's health.**”*

-Lauren Luna-Valdez, Class of 2015. Lauren is Equity Impact Storyteller at Public Health Institute Alliance of Southern California, Public Health Institute. She remembers enjoying having other students in her cohort to help figure out how to make both degrees work, and helping each other find jobs after graduation.



“The public health people get to appreciate the significance of the built environment, as a way to actually make these things happen, like sidewalk cuts or showers in public places for the homeless...And on the other hand, for the designers, urban designers, it's really important that they understand that they are serving a much of a larger social purpose, which is to help allow people to be healthy, and to figure out what health means... And so there's all these aspects of health that designers need to understand that they are serving. Bringing the two fields together makes total sense.”

-CED Architecture Professor **Galen Granz**, on the value of training professionals in both city planning and public health. Prof. Granz collaborated with faculty at the School of Public Health over her years at Berkeley, and said she was immediately very impressed by Prof. Duhl's healthy cities vision and practice and felt it was “comprehensive and visionary.”



“The value of training professionals in a multi-disciplinary way creates professionals who are able to approach issues with a sense of curiosity, knowing that no single field can resolve the most challenging issues facing our society today. The interdisciplinary approach is especially important to grapple with today's urban issues, particularly in addressing some of the issues confronted by historically harmed communities, namely unhoused people, formerly incarcerated people, and people with documentation barriers, to name a few.”



-Bo Chung, Class of 2018. Bo is Senior Project Analyst with the California Strategic Growth Council, where he is working on High-Speed Rail Station community planning. Bo says by combining the city planning and public health fields, he is able to communicate with community members on the various benefits of California's massive new infrastructure beyond a fast-moving train, and think about inclusive and healthy communities. Bo is pictured with fellow public health students Miriam Magaña, Erika Sarmiento, and Gladis Chávez, on an advocacy trip to the state capitol.

“Berkeley’s MCP/MPH program attracts wonderful, creative people who ask questions and think outside the box to prioritize social equity. My favorite part of the program was getting to learn, build, and become best friends with these folks.”

Memorable events for me include the work we did to challenge the programs on the injustices they perpetuated, like the time we staged a protest outside of (former) Dean and Wolch’s office about the lack of diversity in the program. Along with many good people including allies in faculty and staff, there were many ways in which Berkeley as an institution and the programs themselves were problematic, and working with peers to challenge those issues provided its own type of education.”

-Brooke Staton, class of 2017. Brooke is Co-Founder and Managing Partner, Reflex Design Collective, an Equity Design Consultancy.





“As an employee of a large planning department, I am not in a “traditional” public health role. However, I utilize the skills and concepts I gained in the dual program all the time. The framing around health disparities and the methods I’ve learned to analyze and synthesize complex information from my public health curriculum have served me well throughout various community planning projects I’ve worked on. More recently, my work has pivoted to focus on issues of racial equity and environmental justice, and I’m finding that my training in public health is more relevant than ever.”

-Lisa Chen, Class of 2011. Lisa is a Senior Community Development Specialist at the San Francisco Planning Department, where she has worked on environmental justice, food systems and neighborhood planning, among other project areas.



“[This program] builds people that can unique understand intersectional issues and that also helps develop more understanding on how to effectively work with communities. People do not live single issue lives and just one sector isn’t going to make enough of a difference. But the knowing how to look at issues across sectors helps make more of a collective impact.”

-**Irene Calimlim**, Class of 2019. Irene is Health and Environmental Justice Manager, Fathers & Families of San Joaquin, where she is focused on community gardening, urban forestry, Transformative Climate Communities, and AB617.

“I would love to write an essay [on memories from my time at Berkeley.] One of the very special memories was asking Professor Kirk Smith whether there were any favors I could do in China as I had a personal reason to go. Next thing I knew I was bound for Shanghai with a big box of testing equipment that would have months to get to a field study on climate change and indoor air pollution in rural desert villages in the high coal country. I saw and learned rare things I never would have otherwise, met wonderful new friends and colleagues, and had an academic adventure I am forever grateful for.”



-Jason Meggs, Class of 2009. Jason is an East Bay planning consultant, bike advocate and Air Resources Board climate policy whistleblower who worked on health and climate mitigation for the EU after graduating. Jason remembers the challenge of making the change to academia after being an activist for many years, and wishing that there had been resources and awareness on campus for this transition. Jason was the first (known!) dual degree to receive their MPH in the Environmental Health Sciences Division, and recalls friction from the school around being in both programs and needing to “fight” to make it work, as well as encountering some deep environmental health contradictions at Berkeley. Jason would love to connect and collaborate with other healthy city folk and has a unique view of the challenges we face ahead and the preparations and measures needed now.

“As an international student, I gained the most from the global partnerships and networks that the program has. For example, I connected with Slum Dwellers International,, and worked with them to document the health and environmental challenges faced by residents of slum residents all over the world. To date, I have maintained the contacts that I made from this connection and together, engaged in some meaningful work..With the dual training, you start to appreciate the entire continuum and relatedness of challenges that communities face—that problems are in fact wicked problems, very intricately woven, with no single solution.”

-**Sarah Lebu**, Class of 2020, with Ashley Wagner ('20) and Honora Montano ('21) at International House on campus.



“The whole idea of interdisciplinary work is that no single field has all the answers to problems we are trying to solve. The kinds of problems that we are confronted with in the 21st century...require transdisciplinary collaboration, to get out of our silos and come together to find game changing solutions. Public health folks bring certain methods and tools, but they are not the only tools. Transdisciplinary collaboration is our best hope to be able to tackle 21st problems....Transdisciplinary training will create the next generation of problem solvers and changemakers.”

-School of Public Health Dean Michael Lu,
interviewed April 2021





“When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, it felt like it was once again my dualie buddies that quickly came together to help each other through one of the toughest spring semesters ever. Together we adapted, we debated, and most of all we supported each other in so many ways. I couldn't have made it through this program without the companionship of other passionate students who see things through these multiple lenses of public health and planning. And that's another incredibly unique aspect of Berkeley's MCP MPH dual degree program today; you're not alone. We're in this together.”

-Cynthia Armour, Class of 20 is Legislative Health Program Specialist at the Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Branch, Center for Healthy Communities, California Department of Public Health

“Berkeley's MCP MPH program, being more established than other similar programs around the country, has an extensive alumni network and passionate, magnetic cohorts of students that draw in additional students to the dual program when they had only initially signed up for one. The history of having strong and larger cohorts is the reason why I chose Berkeley's program and it was the best thing about my experience in the program.”

-**Shazia Manji**, Class of 2020. Shazia is a Research Assistant at the Turner Center for Housing Innovation.





“Public health is my calling, but urban planning is the vehicle (bicycle?) for putting the work into action. Public health has long been grounded in equity before that was a buzzword...My MPH education equipped me with the tools to analyze and advance health equity, while my MCP trained me on ways to change city codes and build walkable corridors. I also had the opportunity to intern at leading nonprofits based in Oakland during my education and learned lots of valuable practical strategies around effectuating change: coalition building, media advocacy, etc. All in all, I’m so grateful for the experience and have no doubt that it helped make me a more effective professional.”

-Nicole Ferrara, Class of 2009. Nicole is Policy & Intergovernmental Affairs Advisor at the City of Oakland Department of Transportation.



“We have tried to give the program an identity, grounded deeply in health equity, and in trying to define what that means. I think that was there when the program started, there was a lot of interest, and it has evolved. That's something that I've personally tried to do to give the program a unique identity from others around the country and around the world who are doing similar graduate or undergraduate programs or research projects. Maybe it's not fully embodied in our program just yet, but I think for me, that's an important value.”

-**Prof. Jason Corburn**, program director. For more of Jason's reflections on the program, see the History Timeline.



“For me what was so memorable was the hands on experience - it is so much better than, you know, than books. Because I was doing that hands on experience, That's why I ended up going to working community organizing. I was really inspired by the fact that if you give the opportunity to students to do that kind of hands-on project work, it makes a huge difference in what you're planning to do with your life or how you see issues and how effective and how important it is for communities. And so that aspect, I think, is maybe not unique, but it's very, very important, and very rewarding at the same time.”

-Perla Barrientos, Class of 1995



*“I think the best part about the dual program is that it **trains students to be specialized generalists**. Dualies pick up a lot of skills through the program (ex: GIS, data analysis, program planning, epidemiology, research methods) and are able to use them flexibly in whatever field they pursue. I am an urban researcher focusing on both housing programs and healthcare services for people with opioid use disorder. Not only am I able to put the dualie class content to use in looking at each of these topics, but my work requires me to think about how to target these services for vulnerable populations across geographies.”*

-Donna Leong, Class of 2020. Donna is a Senior Associate for Pew Charitable Trusts.



“If it were up to me, it is absolutely necessary to pair the two disciplines. There needs to be a more robust conversation within planning about social determinants of health because it is that built environment that is creating those those inequitable outcomes.”

In public health, I think I think we do a pretty good job studying the built environment. But then there's a lack of understanding around the government governmental processes...and unfortunately, in public health, you're sort of addressing the outcomes of that planning. In the political sphere, the two fields are very siloed.”

-Mar Velez, Class of 2015