

# VOICES

The newsletter of the Cancer Epidemiology Education in Special Populations (CEESP) program • Summer 2023



From left to right, CEESP mentor Isabel Cristina Garcés Palacio; CEESP student Diana Hernandez, Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health; CEESP student Almira Lewis, Boston University School of Public Health; and CEESP Director Amr Soliman, in front of the Facultad Nacional de Salud Pública in Medellín, Colombia

## Gathering at the CEESP Table



**A**s I write this, CEESP is in the midst of a new training year—our 17th—and our 2023 cohort is hard at work conducting research around the world, from rural Egypt to the Bronx, from eastern Europe to sub-Saharan Africa, South

America, Vietnam and Jordan. They're developing the skills and know-how to collaborate with cancer scientists and physicians from a range of backgrounds. And they're learning to adapt to unfamiliar cultures, prioritize tasks, innovate solutions, and cultivate resilience. It's all part of preparing the next generation of public health professionals to meet the challenges of cancer research in a fast-changing 21st-century world.

Our 2023 cohort includes 25 stellar graduate students from schools of public health across the United States. They bring an extraordinary diversity of knowledge to the CEESP table. Some are

medical doctors who want their impact to extend beyond individual patients. Some are hoping to give back to the communities that helped raise them. Some have long been interested in cancer research, and others are just discovering this complex and fascinating field. All are linked by their desire to advance the scientific understanding of cancer and contribute to improved outcomes, especially among vulnerable populations.

Mentorship is central to our approach and has been ever since we launched CEESP in 2006. This year, in addition to our traditional online orientation for new students, we introduced a day-long online training session for mentors and students working in Tanzania and Zambia. This pilot session was our first attempt at a more formal meeting between mentors and mentees before embarking on their summer projects, and if it proves effective—as I believe it will—we'll make it a formal part of our orientation program for

everyone. It's a means of ensuring that everyone understands their roles and obligations, and that expectations are clear from the start.

We'll also continue to hold our post-summer career development workshop—a critical component of the CEESP experience, and a chance for students, mentors, faculty and alumni to share research findings and discuss future career development. The workshop is a primary reason we've had such success among our graduates—many of whom now hold leadership positions in cancer epidemiology throughout the world, and are now CEESP mentors themselves. I look forward, as always, to reporting on our progress in the next issue of *Voices*.

**Amr S. Soliman, MD, PhD**  
*CEESP Program Director*

## About the Program

The Cancer Epidemiology Education in Special Populations (CEESP) Program includes a four-month summer field research experience in foreign countries and among minority populations in the United States. CEESP faculty and field collaborators have the experience to provide expert field mentorship, with the aim of training participants to implement studies in ethnically diverse settings. Since its founding in 2006, CEESP has trained over 200 students who are now pursuing careers around the world.

## Apply for 2024

**Application Deadline: January 28, 2024**

CEESP is accepting applications for the summer of 2024. Open to MPH and first-year PhD students in public health, this unique, fully funded research training program provides critical field research experience in over 20 countries, including the United States.

For more information or to apply visit <http://ceesp.ccny.cuny.edu>

## VOICES

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Send comments to [asoliman@med.cuny.edu](mailto:asoliman@med.cuny.edu). Select features from Voices are available online at [ceesp.ccny.cuny.edu](http://ceesp.ccny.cuny.edu) ©2023.

### MENTOR PROFILE

# The Next Generation of Epidemiologists

*CEESP Co-Director Bob Chamberlain discusses the CEESP approach to communication between mentors and mentees:*

**A**t CEESP we have future cancer epidemiologists early in their careers. They have not had much experience in the field. They've had professors and advisors assigned to them in school, but it's not usually been a mentoring style of relationship, and that's unfortunate.

During my years at M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, I pioneered a mentorship program, which we've since adapted at CEESP. It's based on a program developed by the Association of American Medical Colleges, a "compact" between mentors and trainees to ensure that trainees aren't exploited and that expectations on both sides of the relationship are clear. We have a similar contract at CEESP,



which all our trainees sign before starting their fieldwork. Our contract includes statements such as "Field site mentors will clearly communicate expectations to students."

We're moving toward developing a similar contract for CEESP mentors. We're always working to improve communication and avoid misunderstandings. ■

*CEESP Co-Director Bob Chamberlain is a Professor Emeritus at the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center and Professor at the CUNY Research Foundation.*

### MENTOR Q&A



## Mentorship: The Big Picture

*Chloe Teasdale, an assistant professor of epidemiology and biostatistics at the City University of New York, joined CEESP as a co-investigator in 2022. She spoke to Voices about her work as a CEESP mentor.*

**Q: Why is CEESP such a vital training experience for students?**

**Teasdale:** They have to do everything from start to finish—come up with a project, design a study, design the analysis plan, collect data—or if they're given a data set, they have to clean and organize the data and design the analysis. And then they have to do it themselves, but with our very close mentorship.

**Q: You're mentoring CEESP student Danya Birnbaum this summer. What do you see as your role?**

**Teasdale:** I see my role as helping her figure out what she's interested in and where

she wants to put her energies. This is a great opportunity for Danya to see whether she likes taking large medical record data and sifting through them and figuring out how to work with them—and whether she wants to work on issues related to women living with HIV and cervical cancer, or she wants to focus on something else. The nitty gritty part of mentorship is great—guiding her through the project, giving technical input, advising on how to write a scientific paper. But the bigger picture for me is helping her figure out if she's interested in cancer epidemiology—that's the point of this program. And if she is, what will her specific area of cancer epidemiology be? ■

### STUDENT PROFILE

# Close to Home

**H**aving grown up in New York and attended school in the Bronx, **Danya Birnbaum**, an MPH student at the City University of New York, is spending the summer as a CEESP fellow researching cervical cancer screening trends and care for women living with HIV who are being treated at Montefiore Medical Center in the Bronx—a historically underserved area.

**Birnbaum wants to understand how screening behaviors are stratified among different demographic groups.**

Her work is part of an existing project at Montefiore in collaboration with researchers at CUNY and Albert Einstein. Chloe Teasdale, an assistant



professor of epidemiology and biostatistics at CUNY, and a CEESP faculty member, is Birnbaum's mentor.

With the right compliance with guidelines, cervical cancer is preventable, Birnbaum notes. That's because women with HIV have a much higher risk of developing human papillomavirus (HPV), and HPV is a leading risk factor for cervical cancer—so timely screenings can do a lot to reduce morbidity and mortality. Birnbaum is keen to find out how screening behaviors are stratified among different demographic groups—"who's over-screened and who's under-screened," and the degree to which demographic features like race, ethnicity, insurance status, age, and contraceptive methods affect screening trends. She hopes her findings will contribute to "more targeted and effective initiatives going forward." ■

### STUDENT PROFILE

# On a Mission

**W**hen cancer struck **Isabel Curro** at age 24, she found herself "in an unlucky situation," she says. And yet at the same time, "I was very lucky. I had a support system. I was still on my parents' health insurance. I had access to high-quality care because of where I lived—all of it." Curro received treatment and is now on a preventive-care regimen. But she's keenly aware that many people in similar situations lack the advantages she had. It's why she's pursuing an MPH at City University of New York, and why she's conducting research as a CEESP fellow to try to understand how different populations in New York City navigate cancer-related screening and treatment.

She's focusing specifically on Asian Americans, who have "the lowest screening rates," she says, and African Americans, who have "the highest screening rates but also the highest mortality rates. Clearly there's a huge issue here." Social and environmental factors—such as language barriers, mistrust of the medical system, and access to health care insurance—are likely causes for the disparities.

Curro will be working with researchers at New York University to analyze cancer-related community health data collected by



**They hope to find ways to boost participation in cancer-related screenings and research among vulnerable populations.**

the NYU Health System. They hope to find ways to boost participation in cancer-related screenings and research among vulnerable populations. Curro is thrilled to be part of CEESP. "I want to be out in the field, not just reading about it," she says. "I want to be figuring out how to bring interventions to communities." ■

MENTOR PROFILE

# From Mentee to Mentor

When **Mario Jesus Trejo** learned he'd gotten a CEESP grant to conduct research in Zambia's capital city, Lusaka, in 2017, he was overwhelmed—and intimidated. "I can't believe they're sending me to Zambia to do this project!" he thought to himself. "I've never done anything like this before."

**Rachael Hinkel** knows the feeling. "Imposter syndrome," she calls it. When she was awarded a CEESP grant this year



**Mario Jesus Trejo (middle) with CEESP Director Amr Soliman (right) and Mulele Kalima (left) of the University Teaching Hospital in Lusaka, who mentored both Trejo and Rachel Hinkel.**

to do research on cervical cancer in the same Lusaka facility where Trejo worked, she too panicked. But it was Trejo himself who reassured her. A graduate of the University of Arizona School of Public Health, where Hinkel is an MPH student, Trejo offered to mentor Hinkel through the CEESP application process and both the research and publication phases of her project. He

reminded her "that it's an education program, and you're not expected to be an expert," Hinkel says.

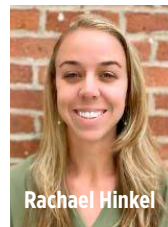
She believes that having a mentor with prior CEESP experience coach her through the application process was the "secret sauce" to her getting a fellowship.

Trejo is one of 15 former CEESP trainees who've gone on to become CEESP mentors—a process that's indispensable to the program's success, says CEESP Director Amr Soliman.



**Rachael Hinkel in Lukasa**

In Zambia, Hinkel is building on the research Trejo began in 2017. She's working at the same facility in Lusaka, with many of the same collaborators, to examine the timeline between cervical cancer



**Rachael Hinkel**

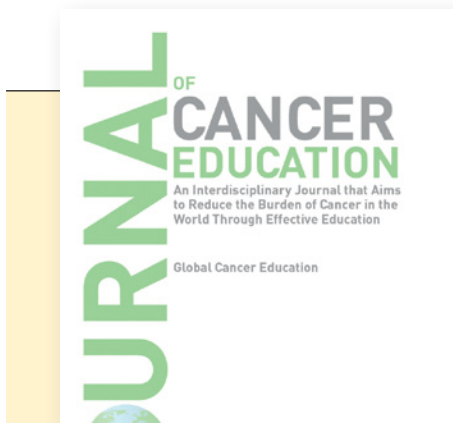
screening and diagnosis and to help determine whether initiating screening behaviors early on affects the stage of cervical cancer at diagnosis. She's also studying the role HIV plays in this relationship.

**Trejo is one of 15 former CEESP trainees who've gone on to become CEESP mentors.**

Trejo relishes his role as mentor, which he describes as "being something of a cheerleader." And he continues to reassure Hinkel that she's in the right place, doing the right thing, even when she encounters stumbling blocks. "It's going to make you a really good mentor for the next student," he reminds her. ■

## A Mentorship Legacy

*Now in its 17th year, CEESP has trained over 200 public health students in cancer epidemiology since the program launched in 2006. Fifteen of those students have gone on to become CEESP mentors, among them Mario Jesus Trejo. CEESP currently works with over ## mentors on five continents.*



## New@CEESP

**On September 1, CEESP Director Amr Soliman** will become editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Cancer Education*, the official journal of the American Association for Cancer Education and the only professional journal in the United States devoted

to the topic of cancer education. Soliman says he's honored to be at the helm of the prestigious journal, which has been in business for 40 years, and he hopes his new role proves fruitful for CEESP as well.