

News/Updates

New Gillings Innovation Laboratories to Focus on Water and the Environment, Statistical Genomics, Drug Safety and 21st Century Public Health Teaching

Mike Aitken, PhD, professor and chair of the School's department of environmental sciences and engineering, and his team will tackle a pressing public health problem in North Carolina, reducing the environmental and health related risks stemming from hog waste management and disposal. This Lab will develop methods for reducing air and water pollution from hog waste, while harnessing methane from the wastes as an energy source.



A potential benefit from improvements in hog waste management is better water quality in rural communities.

Putting UNC at the forefront of statistical genomics research, **Danyu Lin, PhD**, Dennis Gillings Distinguished Professor of Biostatistics, and **Fred Wright, PhD**, professor of biostatistics, are teaming up to establish new ways to look at the associations between gene variations, diseases and health conditions. This Lab will explore the relationship between genetic risk and susceptibility to diseases of public health significance such as cancer, diabetes and obesity.

News/Updates, continued on page 4

Spotlight Focus on North Carolina



North Carolina is both a spotlight and a guiding light. The UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health is proud to be the state's school of public health. *Solutions* calls particular attention to North Carolina in this issue, but covers it in every issue.

The UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health seeks to reduce the impacts of human activity on the environment across North Carolina.

North Carolina is home to more than twice as many people as it had when the School opened; fewer than four million in 1939 versus more than 8 million in 2009. The School must not only understand the drivers of this change—the economic changes, demographic changes, strengths and weaknesses—but also participate actively to deliver on our mission to *improve public health, promote individual well-being, and eliminate health disparities across North Carolina and around the world*. We can't be spectators.

Carolina Public Health Solutions (CPHS) advisers include a number of people who are dedicated to the health of North Carolina. Seventeen members of the Acceleration Advisory Committee live in North Carolina. Committee members are alumni, entrepreneurs, educators and community leaders who help to demonstrate the power of collaboration and bridge public health with economic forces.

Spotlight, continued on page 3

Carolina Public Health Solutions Mission

In February 2007, the UNC School of Public Health received a \$50 million gift from Dennis and Joan Gillings, providing our School with critical resources to accelerate delivery of real-world solutions for some of humankind's most challenging public health problems. Carolina Public Health Solutions manages the gift's resources on behalf of the School. Our mission is to help the School anticipate emerging public health challenges, accelerate solutions, and improve people's lives across North Carolina and around the world.

From the Managing Director

The UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health's tagline is "Anticipate. Accelerate." Few of us anticipated the economic changes of the past months; however, the gift from Dennis and Joan Gillings allows several faculty to launch or accelerate their discoveries during this time. Information on four new Gillings Innovation Labs and other initiatives appears in News.

Carolina Public Health Solutions (CPHS) is lucky to have great advisers from across North Carolina and beyond. Jim Johnson strengthens our connections to economic environment in a broad sense. You will see his thoughts about silos and bridges in our featured Profiles. You will also be interested in Bill Friday's recent interviews about heart disease on UNC TV .

News coverage of funded projects has had a steady state element plus some good fortune. When the UNC men's basketball team won the national championship, the UNC-CH newspaper, *The Daily Tar Heel* (DTH), printed 85,000 copies instead of its typical 30,000+ copies. Their coverage of the four new Gillings Innovation Labs appeared in that mega-issue. (We don't know whether anyone read non-basketball news that day, mind you, but it's there.) Later that week, Will Vizuete's air pollution Innovation Lab was the story that displaced basketball on the front page of the DTH.

More than 20 students at the School currently receive some support from the Gillings gift. Over the next year, we will work with faculty to provide additional support to top students via training grants and dissertation fellowships.

By the time you read this, the School will have graduated a new class. Approximately half of our graduates choose to remain in North Carolina after graduation, deploying their new skills to improve the health and well-being of North Carolinians.

As campus quiets down for the summer months, our own work continues apace, and we would love to hear from you.

Best regards,

Julie MacMillan

Profiles

of two Acceleration Advisory Committee Members What brings these individuals to public health?



Jim Johnson talks with students at the UNC Frank Hawkins Kenan Institute of Private Enterprise. Photo courtesy of UNC Kenan-Flagler Business School

James H. Johnson, Jr.,
William R. Kenan Jr.
Distinguished Professor of Strategy and Entrepreneurship at UNC's Kenan-Flagler Business School, is a demographer whose devotion to North Carolina extends to and connects with public health.

"Silos are out; bridges are in," Johnson says. Health disparities and obesity are problems that concern him about North Carolina's economy and its health. Individuals and firms considering a move to North Carolina look at disparities and obesity prevalence as surrogate markers for health and wellness as well as healthcare costs. As North Carolina grows, we can accommodate these increases well or badly. Johnson believes public health can help North Carolina build more agile and flexible responses to the current demographic changes.

What does he like about Innovation Labs and other efforts funded by the Gillings gift? "These are all innovative and creative, and some of them are very entrepreneurial." In view of the scale of health-related problems in North Carolina and beyond, interdisciplinary approaches must come to the fore. "Progress is at the intersection of disciplines and professional schools....These [public health] projects will help catapult or keep us ahead. More people will want to live here and do business here." Luckily for us, he's already a North Carolinian.

Looking Ahead

- Gillings dissertation fellowships will be awarded to eligible UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health doctoral candidates during the 2009–2010 academic year. More information concerning these awards will be forthcoming. The SPH-wide Student Awards Committee will conduct reviews of candidates for these awards.
- The four recently awarded Gillings Innovation Laboratories will begin on or after July 2009. See www.sph.unc.edu/accelerate for information about each of the funded Innovation Labs since the program began in 2007.

Feedback

What do you think of our newsletter? How can we improve? What would you like to see? Please write to us at accelerate@unc.edu and give us your feedback.

Solutions is a quarterly publication of Carolina Public Health Solutions and the UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health. Contact us at 135 Dauer Drive, CB #7415, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-7415. Phone: 919-843-3945 Email: accelerate@unc.edu.

William Friday, UNC President Emeritus, is renowned for his thirty-year tenure as president of the UNC system, his national public service and his relentless devotion to education. His skills as a public health educator are remarkable, too, as it turns out. Friday devoted two episodes of his UNC-TV show, *North Carolina People*, to heart health, heart disease and cardiovascular surgery. He expands his personal experience into public education about risk factors, symptoms, and treatments of this common chronic disease. You can see these fascinating shows, which originally aired April 24 and May 1, at www.unctv.org/ncpeople/watch_people.html.



From left, UNC President Emeritus William Friday at the unveiling of a bust of Friday, as Chancellor Holden Thorp, UNC President Erskine Bowles and William Johnson, former member of the Board of Trustees and Board of Governors look on. Photo courtesy of Allie Mullen

Acceleration Advisory Committee

The Acceleration Advisory Committee meets approximately twice a year to advise the School on the portfolio of funded programs, finances, and potential partners and funders. Their next meeting will take place in December 2009.

Fred T. Brown, Jr., FACHE, MPH
 Andrew J. Conrad, PhD
 Leah Devlin, DDS, MPH
 William C. Friday
 Ronald S. Geizer, PhD
 Dennis Gillings, CBE
 Joan Gillings
 Peggy D. Glenn, ex officio
 Tracy Harris
 Donald A. Holzworth, MS
 Joan Huntley, PhD, MPH
 James H. Johnson, Jr., PhD
 Paul Jones, MFA
 Julie MacMillan, MPH, ex officio
 Tracy Orleans, PhD
 Barbara K. Rimer, DrPH, ex officio
 Jimmy Rosen, MBA, MSPH
 Linda Sanders, MBA
 Leah Sirkus, MHS
 Victor J. Strecher, PhD, MPH
 Melissa Watt, PhD
 Derek Winstanly, MBChB
 Louise Winstanly, Esq
 Robert L. Wright, OD
 Chen-yu Yen, PhD, PE

Spotlight: Focus on North Carolina, *continued from page 1*

Innovation Labs are helping to solve the state's most pressing public health problems in partnership with state and local public health departments, community groups, local businesses and other universities. Alice Ammerman's team, for instance, examines local, sustainable farming and its effect on health, the economy and the environment.

Joe Morrissey and his colleagues tackle the growing challenge of serving the needs of the mentally ill in North Carolina. David Richardson integrates health, demographic and environmental data across our state to accelerate improvements in public health. Recently awarded Innovation Labs confront the challenges of hog waste management and disposal, and support a stronger public health workforce in our state.

Innovation Labs directly contribute to the goals of the University's **UNC Tomorrow** (www.nctomorrow.org) initiative through efforts to improve health, improve the quality of our environment, increase engagement with local communities and strengthen our state's global competitiveness.

For more information about the School's work in North Carolina, visit the interactive map at www.sph.unc.edu/research/north_carolina_812_7681.html and the North Carolina Institute for Public Health's web site www.sph.unc.edu/nciph/.

About the Program

We have been asked many times how Gillings Innovation Labs and Gillings Visiting Professors are selected. Each type of proposal is evaluated by subject matter experts within and outside UNC, and also by SPH leadership (department chairs and other members of the SPH Dean's Council).

Innovation Lab proposals are reviewed by content experts—approximately 150 during the first two award selection rounds—who judge brief four page proposals on potential impact, methodological rigor, and the quality of the project team. The highest ranked brief proposals are reviewed by School leaders, and the most promising are invited to prepare full proposals.

Full Innovation Lab proposals, up to 15 pages, are reviewed by the same process—expert reviewers followed by School leaders—and the highest ranked are recommended to the Dean for support.

Visiting Professorship proposals are reviewed and recommended following a similar process. At times, Innovation Labs and Visiting Professorships may be solicited, if the opportunity is timely and the potential for impact great.

The role of Carolina Public Health Solutions (CPHS) in the process is to assure rigorous and fair review, and transparent processes—CPHS staff neither recommend specific projects nor advocate on behalf of specific projects.

News/Updates, *continued from page 1*

Using national data, **Til Stürmer, MD, MPH**, associate professor of epidemiology and Director of the UNC-GSK Center for Excellence in Pharmacoepidemiology and Public Health, and his colleagues will assess the risks and benefits of drugs to older adults using innovative methodologies. This Lab will provide important insights about the comparative effectiveness of certain drugs when they are used by older adults who are often excluded by clinical studies. This approach is of critical importance since not every vital question can be answered with a new clinical trial.

Building on the experience and research in distance education that exists at UNC, and exploiting new technologies and communication breakthroughs, **William Zelman, PhD**, professor of health policy and management, and his team will design and pilot financial literacy learning modules for public health that will integrate distance and classroom-based education. Determining best practices for this combined approach will meet the needs of the growing number of public health distance students in the 21st century.



WUNC Public Radio, *North Carolina Voices: Global Health Connections*

WUNC's Rose Hoban, with a child in Malawi.
Photo courtesy of Rose Hoban

North Carolina Public Radio-WUNC aired a special series of reports highlighting the public health connections between North Carolina and southeastern Africa. Features include UNC's groundbreaking research in the treatment of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases in Malawi, one of the world's poorest countries. Audio clips of the series are available at <http://wunc.org/programs/voices>.

Don Holzworth Named Executive in Residence

Don Holzworth, Chairman, Futures Group International, has been named "executive in residence" at the UNC's Gillings School of Global Public Health. Holzworth is advising the dean, departments, faculty and students on matters such as strategic planning for potentially high impact public health areas and the identification of new funding partners.

Supporting the Globalization of Public Health Curricula

An initiative to further globalize the UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health curricula is underway with leadership from the School's Office of Global Health. The infusion of more global health content across the curricula will strengthen the School and reflect the wishes of students and faculty.