

CAROLINA'S SCHOOL of PUBLIC HEALTH APPOINTS  
SPECIAL ASSISTANT to the DEAN for DIVERSITY  
*& continues tradition of*  
cultivating  
diversity

BY LINDA KASTLEMAN

**D**r. Jessie Satia was born in the state of Washington but grew up in Cameroon.

“I am quite literally an ‘African-American,’ having lived in both places,” she says.

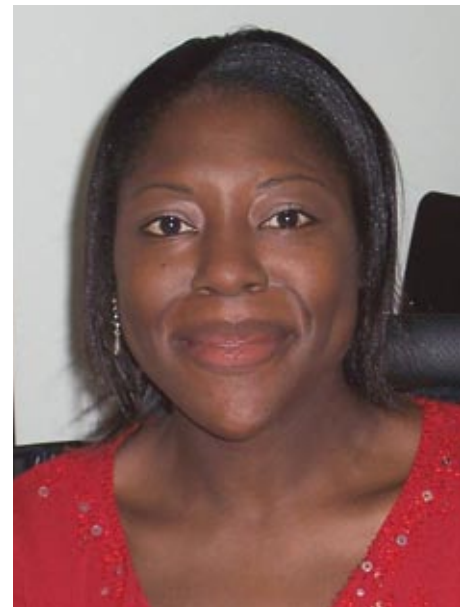
Now, Satia, assistant professor in the UNC School of Public Health’s Departments of Nutrition and Epidemiology, has accepted the challenge of bringing more minority students, faculty and staff to the School.

In appointing Satia to the position of special assistant to the dean for diversity last January, Dean Barbara K. Rimer noted, “When diversity is everyone’s business, sadly, it often is nobody’s job. In creating this role, I wanted to make it *somebody’s* business and, by doing so, help us all. Dr. Satia is the perfect choice. We wanted her to return to UNC, after spending two years in industry. She’s an impeccable scientist and teacher and a charismatic person who will be able to motivate others to join her journey.”

Satia continues the School’s tradition of encouraging minority students and faculty to come to Carolina. From the outset, School leaders have recognized the need for the faculty, staff and student body to reflect the diversity of the N.C. and U.S. populations (see timeline on page 48). In that sense, Satia follows in the footsteps of Dr. William T. Small, Jr., who came to UNC in 1971 as coordinator of minority affairs with a charge to increase minority student enrollment in graduate degree programs. During Small’s 28-year tenure, he continued to enhance the diversity of the School population.

Satia brings a unique perspective to her role. Her parents, both of whom have doctoral degrees, are from Cameroon. Her mother, who has a Ph.D. in educational psychology, and her father, a fisheries expert, were studying at the University of Washington – Seattle, when she was born.

“When my parents finished school and worked for a while—I was about four years old at the time—they decided they wanted to return to Africa and give back to their homeland,” Satia says. ▶▶



Dr. Jessie Satia

“Cameroon was a great place to grow up,” Satia adds. “African values are strong in terms of discipline and respect for people. Although my family was educated in the United States, my parents tried to give my younger sisters and me those traditional values.”

Satia returned to the United States to attend the University of Washington—Seattle, where she earned a bachelor of science degree in microbiology, a master of science degree in laboratory medicine, a master of public health degree in epidemiology and a doctorate in nutritional epidemiology.

Following are some of her thoughts on diversity at Carolina’s School of Public Health.

**Q: Why is diversity important to the School?**

**A:** First of all, people bring their unique cultural and social perspectives to any relationship or exchange of information. In public health, which is intrinsically related to people’s backgrounds and identities, it’s enriching to have a diverse group of faculty and students. Their variety allows us to get a fuller understanding of the issues that we face as public health practitioners.

Second, people relate better to others who are like themselves. So, if you are conducting a study about the African-American community, participants tend to respond more fully when African-American researchers and staff are involved.

As we know, America is a melting pot—a place of great cultural diversity. We are a country of people from all over the world, and the population of the School of Public Health should reflect that.

**Q: How are you developing strategies to increase diversity among students, faculty and staff?**

**A:** My first charge is to promote the opportunities Carolina has to offer minorities, including excellent educational opportunities and social support.

To enhance these experiences, it is



important that we conduct research that attracts people from diverse backgrounds. Minority researchers and students are eager to be a part of investigations that concern them, and their involvement will increase the diversity of our faculty and student body.

I want to ensure that we have a presence at every possible forum to showcase our School—to encourage minority students to attend and minority faculty candidates to apply when we have faculty openings. We also are undertaking some practical, administrative tasks—updating the Diversity pages on the School’s Web site, developing a detailed plan for recruitment and retention, working on training grants focused on health disparities, designing a guidebook with information about the area that would be of interest to minorities. We are creating a catalogue of churches and restaurants, schools and

able behaviors like diet, physical activity and supplement use contribute to risk for colorectal and prostate cancers.

I’m also studying cancer survivorship. People are living longer with cancer because of improved screening and treatment. But once diagnosed, a patient has a higher risk of a recurrence or a second primary cancer. I’m interested in understanding how to prevent second cancers and survive the diagnosis and treatment in a healthy way.

**Q: Why do you think it is important for more students of color to become involved in biomedical and bio-behavioral research?**

**A:** Students are our greatest ambassadors. They are enthusiastic about their work, because everything’s new and exciting to them. More importantly, they are the next generation, the ones who are

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social settings—information that reflects the diversity in our community and shows that people who want a multicultural experience will enjoy living here.

**Q: Tell us about your own research with minority populations.**

**A:** Most of my research focuses on health disparities among African-Americans and whites, investigating the way modifi-

going to take over. A lot of us may think we’re going to work forever, but we won’t, and we need to train the next cohort of researchers.

The most important reason we want to involve minority students, however, is to have our School mirror society. Communities throughout the world and all over America are diverse, and so it is important that our students, faculty and staff reflect that diversity. ■