

# *The Evolution of the School's* ANNUAL *Minority Health* CONFERENCE

“A large part of public health is bringing your knowledge to the public, so having the experience of planning something major like this is great,” says LaToya White, one of the co-chairs of the 2007 Minority Health Conference, to be held February 23 at the UNC William and Ida Friday Center for Continuing Education.

White and co-chair Nancy DeSousa are graduate students in the Health Behavior and Health Education department in the UNC School of Public Health. They’re also members of the Minority Student Caucus, which launched the annual event in 1977 (see page 52). The conference is the oldest student-organized minority health conference in the United States. Every year, it draws hundreds of students, professionals and community members from across the country. Last year, more than 300 people attended.

“You can experience all aspects of public health at the conference, and it really influences how students see themselves as professionals coming into public health,” White says. “Students hear firsthand what works well for other people, and they also hear from community members. They’re better able to serve their communities because of this experience.” DeSousa echoes that view: “One of the benefits of the conference is getting all these different voices in the same room,” she says. “It adds to students’ professional experience. They’re

networking not only with professionals and public health experts, but also with other students who will be working in the health field.”

“The event is also an important educational event for public health practitioners, human services professionals, research staff, and students and faculty from other universities,” DeSousa says.

The topic for the 2007 conference is “HIV/AIDS after 25 years: Where things were, are, and are going for minority communities.” The keynote speaker will be Dr. David J. Malebranche, assistant professor of medicine at Emory University’s School of Medicine, AIDS researcher with a public health background and physician who treats AIDS patients in Atlanta.

The student organizers want to keep the focus domestic, White says. They plan to look at HIV/AIDS in various minority communities in the United States. “We want to look at college-age students and the different issues for women. We hope to have representatives come and represent the different minority groups—African-American, Latino, Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian.”

DeSousa and White served on the planning committee for last year’s conference on “community-based participatory research.” “It’s a major conference, and a lot goes into organizing it,” White says. “It’s beneficial for students to be involved in planning something like ▶▶

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this because these are skills that will be needed later when working in the field of public health.”

The Minority Student Caucus was formed in the early 1970s, in part to help diversify the profession by attracting more students of color to the School. Other School organizations involved in the conference include the Student Union Board, the Minority Health Project and the N.C. Institute for Public Health. The North Carolina Department of Health also supports the event, along with the UNC School of Public Health. The conference keynote lecture is broadcast each year by satellite and Internet, and the lecture abstract, slides and Webcast are archived online at the conference Web site at [www.minority.unc.edu/sph/minconf](http://www.minority.unc.edu/sph/minconf). Videotapes of the broadcast are distributed by the Public Health Foundation.

These technologies expand the conference’s impact beyond the roughly 500 people who take part each year. “I’ve only been able to ‘attend’ the Webcast of these lectures,” Professor Alice Furumoto-Dawson of the University of Chicago told past organizers. “Yet, every year the UNC School of Public Health Minority Health Conference Webcast and its associated Web site have been among the most informative and useful events/resources I access during the year.” ■



LaToya White and Nancy DoSousa, co-chairs of the 2007 Minority Health Conference, have big plans for the February event. The two are graduate students in the School’s Department of Health Behavior and Health Education.