



PHOTO BY LAYLA LAVASANI

Dr. Peggy Bentley (far left), in Senegal

Spotlight on our students

Why public health?

The answer is evident to the more than 1,700 students at UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health. They want to stop the spread of disease, end poverty, promote health and education, stop wars — *save the world*.

“Disease and poor health limit opportunities for individuals and societies, especially among vulnerable populations,” says Jess Edwards, doctoral student in epidemiology. “Public health removes these barriers.”

“The need for good health is a crucial component of people’s well-being around the world,” says Kimberley Geissler, doctoral student in health policy and management, “and the cost of poor health, both physically and financially, is often staggeringly high.”

Students’ research contributes significantly to the School’s overall research endeavors, and it provides them with the valuable experience of conducting research under the mentorship of experienced faculty members. Training grants and research assistantships support students, as do gifts to the School — through scholarships, travel

funds, research support and technology improvements. It is appropriate to feature students’ research in this issue, which focuses especially on the School’s research and on the donors who make much of it possible.

Whether students are earning degrees in epidemiology or environmental sciences and engineering, nutrition or health policy and management, their enthusiasm is contagious. Sometimes, a student’s asking *Why not?* can open the door to creativity and innovations that would not have occurred without the question.

“It is such a gift to be on the faculty of a school of public health that attracts students and postdocs who are not only the best and brightest but who are committed to making a difference,” says Eugenia Eng, DrPH, professor of health behavior and health education.

“It is through following their careers that I can behold the real and meaningful impact from our work.” Eng speaks knowingly. She recently received the ASPH/Pfizer Faculty Award for Excellence in Academic Public Health Practice.

Michael Aitken, PhD, chairs the Department of Environmental Sciences and Engineering, which attracts students with a wide range of scientific interests, from ecology to engineering. “Many students choose our department because we’re based in a public health school,” he says. “They want to make a difference, and they perceive that public health focuses on that. They have a connection to the ‘human side’ of the fields we represent, which is different than the culture of other programs.”

Here, students are challenged to make their research count — to choose topics for class work, theses and dissertations that anticipate public health problems and accelerate public health solutions. Our students’ many awards at the UNC Graduate School’s annual Impact Awards ceremony (see <http://gradschool.unc.edu/student/awards/impact>) reflect the impact of their research.

—Ramona DuBose