We are very excited to welcome our largest ever Fogarty class for the fall 2011 semester. They join us from a variety of backgrounds with experience working for NGO’s, universities, and government health organizations in their respective countries. We are also happy to report that the class of 2011 represents every target NYS-ITRP country including Georgia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Russia, and Estonia. Some of our students will be with us only for the Fall 2011 while others are staying for two semesters or to complete entire MS degree. In addition, we are pleased to welcome back our three returning second-year MS students. Please take a moment to read a short bio on each of our new and returning students!

This year we have three returning students who are working on completing their MS degrees. They are:

Anna Vinogradova, DDS, PhD joins us from St. Petersburg, Russia, where she has been working as the Dental Department Head and a co-investigator клинический проект manager in a EuroSIDA clinical trials cohort study at the St. Petersburg AIDS Center. Anna began the MS in Epidemiology program at the SUNY-Albany School of Public Health in August 2010.

Baurzhan Zhussupov, MS joins us from Almaty, Kazakhstan, where he is Head of the Quality Management Unit of the AIDS Foundation East-West. Baurzhan began the MS in Epidemiology program at the SUNY-Albany School of Public Health in August 2010.

We also have three students from Tbilisi, Georgia through our collaborative program with the Tbilisi State Medical University. They are:

Tariel Todua, MD joins us from Tbilisi, Georgia where he is currently pursuing an MPH degree at the International Public Health School. On his return to Georgia, he plans to continue his work with the Alpha insurance company as a Manager for Hospital Monitoring and resume his work on HIV/AIDS projects.

Maia Khutishvili, MD comes to us from the Department of Pediatrics at the Tbilisi State Medical University. Her research interests include HIV prevalence and risk factors among injecting drug users. She plans to return to Tbilisi at the end of the fall 2011 semester.

Tinatin Abzianidze, MD, MPH currently works with the Maternal and Child Care Union in Tbilisi, Georgia. She completed her MD at the Tbilisi State Medical University and received her...
MPH from the International School of Public Health. She is staying with us for the duration of the fall semester. (She, Maia, and Tariel are all trainees in our collaborative MPH program between NYS-ITRP and Tbilisi State Medical University SPH program).

We also have students joining us from Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Estonia and Russia. They are:

- Liudmyla Slobodianyk, MPH, BMBS is pursuing her PhD at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy in Kyiv, Ukraine from which she already holds an MPH degree. She is also currently employed at the Ukrainian AIDS Center in the Ministry of Health of Ukraine and plans to continue her work at the end of the spring 2011 semester. Her research interests include the effects of interventions on injecting drug users in Ukraine.

- Alyona Mazhnaya, MPH, BS is currently completing work on her PhD in public health administration at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy in Kyiv, Ukraine. She has previously worked with the International HIV/AIDS Alliance in Ukraine and plans to return to Kyiv after the spring 2011 semester.

- Gulzhan Shopayeva, MD, PhD is the Deputy Head of the Department of Infectious and Tropical Diseases at the Kazakh National Medical University in Almaty, Kazakhstan. She has experience in a variety of field relating to HIV/AIDS including pathology, diagnostics and treatment. Gulzhan plans to complete the 2011-2012 academic year at SUNY Albany.

- Zhamilya Nugmanova, MD, PhD is currently the Chair of the Division of HIV Infection and Infection Control at the Kazakh National Medical University in Almaty. She is an HIV/AIDS researchers and public health workers in Kazakhstan and has years of experience in consulting, teaching and formulating public health policy. Among her major initiatives is her extensive work on maternal and child health including an effort to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV. Zhamilya also has a strong history of working effectively with regional and international organization such as AIHA, UNICEF, WHO and CDC to improve the state of public health in Kazakhstan with a particular emphasis on infectious diseases.

- Alice Kivistik MS, BA is a researcher at the National Institute for Health Development in Tallinn, Estonia. She holds a Masters in Epidemiology and a Bachelor Degree in sociology from the University of Tartu. Upon her return, she plans to continue her research on the Estonian drug injecting community.

- Maris Salekesin BA is currently pursuing her MPH degree in epidemiology at the University of Tartu. After receiving her BA in social sciences from Tallinn University, Maris has had extensive experience as a social worker. She is currently a chief specialist at the Ministry of Social Affairs of Estonia where she focuses on injecting drug use.

- Timofei Galankin MD, PhD is a researcher at the St. Petersburg State Pavlov Medical University in Russia. Timofei has extensive clinical experience in psychiatry and plans to continue his research on injecting drug use addiction in Russia. He started his MS in Epidemiology at SUNY Albany in August 2011.

**TB/HIV Coinfection Meeting in Almaty, Kazakhstan**

On October 17-18, NYS-ITRP hosted its first ever research meeting in Kazakhstan, in collaboration with our key partner in the region, the Columbia University’s Global Health Research Center for Central Asia (GHRCCA). Columbia University’s International Center for AIDS Care and Treatment Programs (ICAP) also contributed expertise and faculty to this program. The program, “TB/HIV Co-infection in Kazakhstan: A Meeting for Research Collaborators,” brought together more than 50 participants, including US teaching faculty and Kazakh clinical, laboratory, and behavioral researchers who represented NGO, academic, and governmental institutions. The conference provided an overview of TB/HIV epidemiological trends in Kazakhstan, highlighted state of the art TB diagnostics and HIV/TB co-infection treatment strategies, and outlined strategies on implementing collaborative TB/HIV services for screening and treatment. The meeting concluded with a discussion on research priorities for TB/HIV management from behavioral and clinical/laboratory perspectives, which laid the foundation for future potential research collaborations. The participants gave the meeting an excellent rating.

During this visit we were also able to conduct interviews with candidates for the epidemiology training program while Vincent Escuyer, PhD, Research Scientist from Wadsworth Center, New York State Department of Health, conducted interviews for laboratory training candidates. At our visit to the Kazakhstan School of Public Health, the Rector, Zhanna Kalmatova, signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the SUNY Albany SPH as one of the initial steps in linking our institutions (pictured). As with our first visit to Kazakhstan, US faculty members were impressed by the overall enthusiasm displayed by Kazakh research professionals in establishing research training collaborations.

For the success of this trip, we are especially thankful to the staff of GHRCCA, headed by Nabila El-Bassel, DSW, Professor, Columbia School of Social Work.
Georgia Health Care Summit 2011

Held from February 1-2nd in Washington D.C, the Georgian Health Care Summit was a unique meeting between academia, Georgian health care officials, and international organizations. Fogarty director and member of the organizing committee Dr. Jack DeHovitz and several program alumni participated in two full days of collaborative meetings and panels. The summit was opened by the Georgian Ambassador to the United States, Batu Kutelia as well as the First Lady of Georgia Sandra Elisabeth Roelofs. Also participating in the opening remarks were Health Care Attache at the Embassy of Georgia and Fogarty Alumni, Tamar Tchelidze, and Andrew Urushadze, the Minister of Labor, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia. The panels featured speakers representing several major international organizations such as The World Bank, the WHO, and USAID.

The primary objective of the summit was a review of the practical issues involved in service delivery, education, investment, and financing in the Georgian Health care system and how these issues can be addressed by the year 2020. The first panel dealt exclusively with health care financing. The panel explored the priorities for health care reform and the constraints on health care financing. In a parallel session featuring Dr. Jack DeHovitz and Rima Beriaashvili, the Deputy Rector of the Tbilisi State Medical University, issues of human resources were discussed. In particular, the panel looked at the possible gaps in the regulation of professional medical practice and the constraints placed on the medical education system.

The final sessions focused on service delivery and investment in the Georgian Health System. The panelists discussed the challenges to ensuring an accessible, responsive, high quality, efficient health care delivery system. They also looked at the possibility of leveraging investments for the Georgian healthcare sector for 2011-2020. After the panels, discussion of all four topics was facilitated with working groups. The results of each working group were reported the next day. The summit was concluded with a panel of international experts followed by a panel of Georgian experts who reviewed the main issues and take-away points from a national and an international perspective. The summit was a rare collaborative opportunity that offered a chance to consider the issues faced by the Georgian healthcare industry from a variety of viewpoints.

Annual US-Georgia Workshop Held in Tbilisi

On June 15th NYS-ITRP faculty facilitated and attended a two-day HIV/TB/HCV workshop in Tbilisi, Georgia that we co-sponsor annually with Emory University’s AITRP/GID. The workshop addressed a variety of infectious disease related topics in the Georgian context, including an updates on state of the art treatment and prevention of TB, HIV, and hepatitis. There was also a facilitated discussion on infectious disease research priorities in Georgia as well a review of research ethics with a focus on IRB training and capacity building. As usual, the meeting offered an excellent opportunity to strengthen collaboration between US and Georgia institutions and gave us the chance to catch up with our alumni in the region.

The audience included researchers and physicians from Georgia working at institutions that collaborate with NIH Fogarty International Programs as well as former trainees. Additionally, key leaders from Georgian public health institutions and US supported research training programs were invited to discuss opportunities to enhance collaborative multidisciplinary infectious disease research.

The conference was jointly conducted by the International Training and Research Programs at SUNY Downstate Medical Center, University at Albany, Emory University, and Johns Hopkins University, along with the Infectious Disease, AIDS and Clinical Immunology Research Center in Tbilisi, the Georgian National Center for Disease Control and Public Health, the National Center for TB and Lung Diseases and the Georgian National TB Program and National Reference Laboratory.

Georgia Nursing Training

NYS-ITRP is expanding the scope and reach of our research training activities to include nurse training. In April 2011, Susan Holman, RN, MS, the STAR Program Research Director at Downstate, led a team of faculty in Tbilisi, Georgia to offer a course on nurse research training at the invitation of an USAID-funded Georgian NGO and Emory University nursing faculty development project. We conducted this course in collaboration with faculty from the Center for Drug Use and HIV Research (CDUHR) at NYU School of Nursing. Specifically, CDUHR’s Ann Kurth, PhD, CNM, FAAN, helped develop the curriculum and co-led the workshop, with Adam Sirois, MPH providing additional facilitation and support. Fogarty alumnus Dr. George Kamkamidze and other faculty from the Tbilisi State Medical University School of Public Health joined the US faculty as teachers for the four day workshop on research methods for nurse faculty. The topics included the uses of theory, models and frameworks in formulating research questions and designs. Participants also learned the basic principles of data collection and analysis as well as the main ethical issues faced by researchers. There was also an opportunity to work in small groups on reviews of research literature and discussion of potential research projects for nurses in Georgia.

The workshop was enthusiastically received. The nineteen nurse faculty trainees were evaluated with a written pre/post test. Improvement in scores post-training was statistically significant. We had the opportunity to present a poster on the successful outcomes of this meeting at the 2011 Global Health Conference in Montreal, Canada. NYS-ITRP plans to further support nurse research training in Georgia and to replicate this program in St. Petersburg, Russia in 2012. Stay tuned for more updates about this exciting addition to our program!
We always love to hear from our alumni and as always we want to take the time to highlight one of them and share with you their experience completing the program and how it has aided them since then. This year our interviewee is Nikoloz Chkhartishvili from Tbilisi, Georgia who graciously took the time to answer our questions. Nikoloz started the program in 2006 and completed his MS in Epidemiology at SUNY Albany in 2008. Please take a moment to read about his NYS-ITRP experience!

1. What motivated you to pursue training through the Fogarty New York State International Training and Research Program?

In 2003 I started working at Georgia’s leading institution in the field of HIV/AIDS – Infectious Diseases, AIDS and Clinical Immunology Research Center (IDACIRC). I worked as an epidemiologist at the AIDS Prevention Department and was also involved in research projects. Soon I realized that I lack skills and knowledge necessary for becoming an independent researcher. This was the main motivation for applying for Fogarty Fellowship through the New York State International Training and Research Program (NYS-ITRP), which offered cutting-edge graduate training at the University at Albany.

2. Can you tell us what you remember about your experience while training?

Before coming to Albany I was nervous about studying in the U.S. as it was going to be very different from my previous experience. Indeed, it was different, but it was easy to adapt to. The learning process at Albany was more student-oriented, all you had to do is to engage in and then everything was clear and sometimes even fun. There were a lot of interesting things going on outside the class too. I cannot list everything but apple picking is something every fellow should experience in New York State. A fun ride on a tractor and delicious taste of warm apple cider doughnut is still stuck in my memory.

3. What is the focus of your current work? How did the Fogarty New York State International Training and Research Program prepare you for what you are doing now?

Since 2008, immediately after my return to Georgia, I work as a Manager of the HIV/AIDS Treatment and Care Program, which provides free antiretroviral therapy (ART) to all people living with HIV in Georgia. The program is the most successful intervention implemented in the country and I am happy to contribute to its success. Through this program since 2004 Georgia remains the only nation among former Soviet Union countries to achieve and maintain universal access to ART. As a Head of Research Team I am involved in several research projects, including operational/implementation research aiming at improving patients’ care over its entire continuum. The knowledge obtained during my MS coursework allowed me to pursue doctoral program at Tbilisi State University (TSU). Advanced graduate training at the University at Albany has been crucial for me to advance as public health professional and researcher. I improved and developed basic and practical skills, which are essential in my current activities. I regard NYS-ITRP training as an important step in my career path.

4. Have you received awards or grants since completing your training? If so, please tell us about them.

Since completing the training I received two grants from WHO Regional Office for Europe (2009 and 2010). The first study analyzed spectrum of underlying causes of death among HIV infected individuals since the start of the epidemic in Georgia. The other investigated factors related to late HIV diagnosis. These studies yielded important findings that informed public health action in the country. Recently I completed NYS-ITRP in-country grant on adherence to ART. In 2011, as a member of research team led by Dr. Tengiz Tsertsadze, I was honored to receive National Award, which is Georgia’s highest science award.

5. What was the hardest part about living in the US? In Georgia?

Being far from family was the hardest part about living in the U.S. I used every opportunity to join my wife and son in Georgia. For that reason I completed coursework in three semesters. I was lucky and did not really encounter any difficulties after my return to Georgia. I was re-hired at the IDACIRC – institution full of NYS-ITRP alumni, people with the same thinking, dedication and vision.

6. What are some of your future plans?

I plan to continue working in the field of HIV/AIDS at the IDACIRC. Georgia has made important progress in responding the HIV epidemic, however there are several challenges and our team is dedicated to end the epidemic in the country. My immediate future research agenda is to extend in-country adherence study into larger research by applying to Fogarty International Center’s Global Research Initiative Program for New Foreign Investigators (GRIP). I am excited for the opportunity to continue this work together with NYS-ITRP key faculty Dr. Louise-Anne McNutt and the program Director Dr. Jack DeHovitz. Finally, I plan to complete PhD program at TSU by 2013.
Estonia Ethics and Research Workshop Held in Tartu, Estonia

From June 20th – June 22nd, NYS-ITRP held a workshop on research ethics and behavioral interventions in conjunction with the University of Tartu School of Public Health for its PhD students. The workshop commenced with presentations and discussion on research ethics that were led by Drs. Sean Philpott (from the Fogarty International Center-funded Research Ethics program at Union Graduate College), Andres Soosaar, and Aime Keis (Tartu University); they focused on research ethics with an emphasis on US and European regulations, reviewing protocols and case studies. Students also had the opportunity to work in small groups throughout the first day analyzing research ethics case studies and the process of informed consent.

On the second day of the workshop, Dr. Michael Joseph (SUNY Downstate Medical School of Public Health) provided an in-depth review or scientific research literature followed by a discussion of intervention research by Ms. JoAnn Stevelos. Students again worked in small groups to discuss intervention research and mapping, with further didactic lectures and workshop discussions on the third day. The participants gave the workshop very positive evaluations; we look forward to future research training collaborations with University of Tartu School of Public Health.

Quantitative Analysis Workshop in Selcuk, Turkey

In a joint event with the Open Society Institute, NYS-ITRP established a presence at workshop on quantitative research analysis in Selcuk, Turkey in April, 2011. Fogarty alumni Damir Bikmukhametov and Dr. Louise-Anne McNutt served as the faculty for the two-day workshop. Some of the students attending this workshop were from several schools of public health with which NYS-ITRP has established collaborations: the Kiev-Mohyla School of Public Health (Ukraine), Tbilisi State Medical University School of Public Health (Georgia), and the Kazakhstan School of Public Health. On the first day, participants were given a review of the principles of epidemiology followed by lectures in statistical reasoning and biostatistics analysis. There was also time set aside for a data analysis workshop and a presentation of NYS-ITRP programs.

The second day of the workshop addressed the epidemiology of HIV/AIDS and ethics in human subject research in developing countries. In addition, a more in-depth session on biostatistics analysis was held followed by another session of data analysis and a lecture on longitudinal data analysis. Drs. McNutt and Bikmukhametov used case studies from HIV-related research for student discussion and statistical calculations. The workshop improved the research methodology in Turkey and provided a firm grasp of data analysis techniques to the participants.

NYS-ITRP Introduces New Social Networking Initiatives

As some of you are aware, NYS-ITRP has established a presence on several social networking sites. We now support and regularly update a Facebook page which you can find here: http://www.facebook.com/pages/New-York-State-International-Training-and-Research-Program-NYS-ITRP/226738744037739. On our Facebook page you will see frequent program updates, conference announcements, pictures from recent events, and other useful resources. We encourage you to “like” us and to post or share any thoughts or updates! In addition, we also have a new Twitter account (name: NYS-ITRP) and a LinkedIn page is coming soon.

We are also planning several enhancements to our standard site (http://www.downstate.edu/nysitrp/). The site has been recently updated with new program information but we are also planning to add more resources for students and candidates and hopefully some more graphics and multimedia. For example, we currently have posted the video recording of our meeting “Innovative Applications of Information and Communication Technologies in Addressing the HIV/AIDS Epidemic” (http://www.downstate.edu/nysitrp/conference-2010.html). Some of you attended this meeting and you all may find these topics of interest to your research pursuit. You will also see regular updates about events and other newsworthy items. Please check the sites periodically and keep in touch! We love to hear from you!

NYS-ITRP Director
Dr. Jack DeHovitz
receives Distinguished Service Professor Award

On October 3rd, 2011 Dr. DeHovitz was recognized for his achievements and contributions to the Downstate Community and to the SUNY system as a whole. The Distinguished Service Professor award is the highest honor bestowed by SUNY, in recognition of the extraordinary services that the recipient has provided to the healthcare community and New York State. Downstate President Dr. John LaRosa presented Dr. DeHovitz with a commemorative medal and a certificate of accomplishment. He also highlighted the success of the Fogarty NYS-ITRP program and many other important projects that Dr. DeHovitz directed throughout his career at Downstate.

During his acceptance speech, Dr. DeHovitz spoke of his motivation to focus on HIV/AIDS in the 1980’s when the epidemic was just emerging. Dr. LaRosa took a moment to comment on the extensive progress that has been made in the last thirty years in researching and managing the disease. We congratulate Jack for his accomplishments and dedication!

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

We want to bring your attention to several excellent funding opportunities from the Fogarty International Center and the NIH. Please review the eligibility criteria and apply soon!

Global Research Initiative Program for New Foreign Investigators (GRIP) is an annual award available for students returning to their home country after completing training on a research grant such as NYS-ITRP. Applications are due on March 9th, 2012 for AIDS research and on January 10th, 2012 for everyone else. You can review the details of the award here: http://www.fic.nih.gov/programs/Pages/new-foreign-investigators.aspx

Fogarty International Research Collaboration Award is an award that fosters international research partnerships between NIH-supported scientists and their collaborators in foreign countries. The program aims to benefit the research interests of both collaborators while increasing and enhancing foreign research capacity. This is a $50,000 per year (max 3 years) award. Please see the full description and application instructions here: http://www.fic.nih.gov/programs/pages/research-collaboration.aspx

The next application is due October 1, 2012.


