

An Active Policy Participant, at Home and Abroad

DOCTORAL CANDIDATE **PETER LONG** NEVER HAD A MOMENT to second-guess his decision to forgo medical school in favor of public health. Long, a history major as an undergraduate, quickly became a participant in momentous events.

While a graduate student at Johns Hopkins University School of Hygiene and Public Health in the early 1990s, Long served as a health policy analyst for the Kaiser Commission on the Future of Medicaid in Washington, D.C., which put him in the midst of the national debate over health care reform during the Clinton administration. Among other things, Long prepared briefing notebooks for then-First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton and was a frequent source providing analysis for news media articles.

A year later, he found himself in a completely different – but no less historic – environment, working as a legislative analyst for South Africa’s leading health care advocacy organization during the country’s transition to democracy. In his role as the first American ever hired by the indigenous National Progressive Primary Health Care Network, Long served as a delegate to the constitutional assembly.

“It was incredible to be in a foreign country sitting in the parliamentary chambers as they were crafting the health rights to go in the new constitution,” Long says. “The beauty of that experience was that one day I would be sitting with national parliamentarians, and the next I would be in a rural village of 400 people asking them what the national health act should look like in a workshop that represented the first time these

people had been asked about anything the government did for them.”

As he nears completion of his doctoral dissertation at the UCLA School of Public Health, Long is also a senior program officer at The California Endowment, where he is leading the foundation’s grant-making, policy and advocacy, and research efforts to ensure universal coverage for the state’s children. One day, he hopes to run a foundation of his own. “I really enjoy this environment,” Long says. “It’s a great position from which to influence policy, yet to be nimble, innovative and able to think about interesting, cutting-edge topics.”

For his dissertation research, Long has compared the impact of health insurance with that of behavioral factors such as smoking, physical activity and nutrition on the health of average-risk adults. His data, based on 35-year follow-up studies, suggest that while health insurance and access to a regular physician might be very important to patients who need chronic disease management, for average-risk adults the impacts of smoking and obesity are greater. “Right now we’re allocating about 95 percent of our health spending to medical care and 5 percent to non-personal health interventions,” Long says. “I’m not saying we shouldn’t be concerned about the 43 million people who don’t have insurance, but with limited resources it’s important to at least see where the best investments are.”

In addition to his dissertation research, Long has participated in several projects with faculty in the Department of Health Services, and says he has benefited greatly from the interactions. “The projects I’ve worked on have all included outside-the-box thinking about big questions,” he says. “UCLA has given me the rounding out of my public health education so that I will be not just a health policy person, but a full-service public health professional.”



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