

FAMILY VALUES:

THE FRED H. BIXBY PROGRAM HAS FOSTERED OVERSEAS INTERNSHIPS FOR STUDENTS, SUPPORTED RESEARCH, AND PROMOTED KEY PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUES. A NEW GIFT WILL ENHANCE THE EFFORT, CREATING A NEWLY ENDOWED CENTER.



The Fred H. Bixby Center for Population and Reproductive Health

Leah Maddock (M.P.H. '05) and Kristen Shellenberg

(M.P.H. '05) will remember their two years at the UCLA School of Public Health as a remarkably rich and varied experience, thanks to the Fred H. Bixby Program in Population and Reproductive Health.

As first-year students, they were drawn to Bixby-sponsored talks on topics ranging from contraceptive technologies and childbirth to HIV/AIDS, health needs of sex workers and global health trends. They got to know like-minded students at these talks and at meetings of the Reproductive Health Interest Group (RHIG), established by the Bixby program to bring together the school's students, faculty and staff interested in learning about and discussing reproductive health issues, sharing information, and engaging in service/advocacy projects. "We decided to focus our efforts at UCLA on bringing more reproductive health issues to prominence on campus," says Maddock. With that in mind, RHIG registered as an official UCLA student group, with Maddock and fellow student Rotrease Regan Yates serving as co-presidents, and Shellenberg as a member of the leadership team.



With funding from the Bixby Summer Internship Program, Leah Maddock (l.) worked for the Population Council in Guatemala.

Kristen Shellenberg (in the center of the photo at right) returned from the Bixby-sponsored internship that she and Leah Maddock (far right) conducted at Guatemala's Population Council with a strengthened commitment to the field of reproductive health.



With funding from the Bixby Summer Internship Program, these and other students dispersed for 12 weeks to Mexico, Indonesia, Bangladesh and other countries for reproductive health field experiences. Shellenberg and Maddock journeyed to Guatemala. "I gained an in-depth understanding of the incredible impact that research has on the types of programs that are created, funded and implemented worldwide," says Shellenberg, who returned from her internship at the Population Council's Family, Gender and Development Program with a strengthened commitment to the field of reproductive health.

Back at UCLA, Maddock, Shellenberg and their RHIG colleagues worked with UCLA's Arthur Ashe Student Health Center to ensure that students and staff had access to important contraceptive technology and information (for more on the RHIG, see the sidebar on page 20). They worked closely with faculty members of the Bixby Steering Committee to establish guidelines and requirements for a certificate in reproductive health. With funding from the Bixby program, they attended the March for Women's Lives in Washington, D.C., and traveled to Sacramento to participate in the annual Speak Out for Reproductive Freedom lobbying day.

"The Bixby-sponsored events, speakers and Reproductive Health Interest Group were a perfect complement to my academic coursework and professional interests in domestic and international reproductive health issues," says Shellenberg.

In June, the Fred H. Bixby Foundation made a \$5 million donation to create an endowment to expand and sustain a program that since 2001 has enabled faculty and students such as Shellenberg and Maddock to advance population, reproductive health, and family planning issues in developing countries and domestically through internships, research, lectures and conferences, and service and advocacy work. The gift will create a permanent center dedicated to these activities, increase support for faculty research and outreach projects, and double the number of doctoral fellowships available each year from three to six.

"The Bixby Foundation is dedicated to ensuring the continued excellence of population studies and research at UCLA's School of Public Health," says John

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—Dr. Anne Pebley



Warren, trustee for the foundation. “The creation of the Bixby Center will enable UCLA students to step up their efforts on behalf of women and their families worldwide.”

The Fred H. Bixby Foundation was established in 1972 to support activities related to the problems of overpopulation, and the foundation has supported such programs at the UCLA School of Public Health since 1975. In 2001, a gift exceeding \$1 million established the Bixby Program in Population and Reproductive Health, guided by a steering committee composed of members of the school’s faculty. Beginning that year, the committee and the program’s newly hired director, Dr. Paula Tavrow, established new courses to the extent that graduating M.P.H. students could develop expertise through coursework and field studies to qualify for a Bixby certificate, which was awarded for the first time last June to 11 students. In addition, the Bixby Doctoral Fellows Program provides up to two years of funding for public health doctoral students who specialize in population, reproductive health, and family planning.

“We have built an active interdisciplinary program for faculty and students in which all of the pieces fit very well together,” says Dr. Anne Pebley, professor and chair of the Department of Community Health Sciences. Pebley, who holds the Fred H. Bixby Chair in Population and will head the new center, adds: “The new gift ensures that we have sustained support in perpetuity, and it gives us a base so that we can bring in additional faculty, enhance our coursework, and leverage funding from other sources to greatly expand our research, training and outreach efforts.”

Worldwide, as many as 40 percent of births are unwanted or mistimed; approximately 150 million couples have unmet family planning needs. Each year, 20 million unsafe abortions are performed and 600,000 women die of pregnancy-related causes; 333 million new cases of curable sexually transmitted diseases and 5 million new HIV/AIDS infections are diagnosed; and 2 million girls undergo female genital cutting. Nearly one in three women report having been forced or coerced into having sex.

A field that once focused primarily on population control has broadened significantly over the last decade-plus to take on these and other challenges. “Beginning in the 1950s there was a great deal of concern that we would soon become overpopulated and that, in particular, the high birth rates of developing countries were going to impede their economic

growth,” says Tavrow. That led to a major push to establish family planning programs in the developing world – and to some extreme measures, most notably China’s one-child policy. But by the 1990s, Tavrow notes, a growing number of voices could be heard calling for a more holistic focus for the field: one that takes into account reproductive freedom and health.



Changing demographics made the need for such a shift more apparent. “Between 1950 and 1990, the central theme for population experts in public health was family planning efforts, because birth rates were so high,” says Pebley. “Family planning supplies and ideas hadn’t gotten out in large portions of the world. But starting in the 1980s and continuing into the 1990s, there were dramatic declines in birth rates, even in very poor countries. That led people to ask whether family planning should continue to be the central goal in international population work.”

The answer, Pebley says, is that it remains an important goal, because even with declining fertility rates, too many couples lack access to adequate contraception and family planning services. But at the same time, the focus has expanded to consider reproductive health in a larger context that encompasses far more than just population growth. This shift was crystallized in 1994 at the United Nations International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, Egypt, which defined reproductive health as:

“...a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, in all matters

Since its inception, the Fred H. Bixby Program in Population and Reproductive Health has supported student internships in 17 countries, as indicated on the map above.



The Reproductive Health Interest Group: One Student's Experience

By Robin Lowney Lankton

The mission of the Reproductive Health Interest Group (RHIG) is to bring together students, faculty and staff at the UCLA School of Public Health to learn about and discuss reproductive health issues, share information and engage in service/advocacy projects related to reproductive health. Through RHIG I have gained hands-on experience working in reproductive health issues on campus and in the community. I have attended speaking events hosted by RHIG on topics such as domestic and international policy issues, safer sex for sex workers, and providing medical care for HIV-positive pregnant women.

RHIG creates a supportive network for students. I heard more than 20 students share their reproductive health internship experiences from Guatemala, Kenya, Indonesia, the United States, and other locations. These RHIG meetings created an atmosphere of learning and guidance for finding the best internship to meet my interests and fulfill my public health field studies requirement.

I became co-chair of RHIG's On-Campus Committee and worked on advocacy issues with the Arthur Ashe Student Health Center. A small group of us met with clinicians to discuss educational materials and approaches to health education regarding testicular cancer self-screening at UCLA, and we are continuing to promote this initiative. The On-Campus Committee has worked with the Bixby Steering Committee to create a reproductive health certificate at UCLA. This has led to new reproductive health courses. One of my favorite experiences in my first year was taking the "Building Advocacy Skills: A Reproductive Health Focus" course and then receiving funding from Bixby to participate in the Speak Out for Reproductive Freedom event in Sacramento. I used my practical skills from the classroom to discuss legislation regarding pharmacists refusing to fill contraceptive prescriptions with Sen. Sheila Kuehl's staff member.

The support from the Bixby Foundation has created new opportunities in reproductive health within the School of Public Health. The program is conducive to incorporating students' ideas and is very effectively preparing us to be reproductive health professionals. After completing the program, I plan to stay in Los Angeles and work on reproductive health issues, especially in the Latina community. I will be confident in the reproductive health field as a result of the skills I gained through RHIG and in the classroom.

Robin Lowney Lankton, a second-year M.P.H. student in the Department of Community Health Sciences, is co-president of the RHIG. Approximately 65 current UCLA School of Public Health students are RHIG members.

relating to the reproductive system and to its functions and processes. Reproductive health therefore implies that people are able to have a satisfying and safe sex life and that they have the capability to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when and how often to do so."

While the international population community was changing philosophies, HIV/AIDS was becoming a growing worldwide crisis. "As a sexually transmitted disease very much related to contraceptive use and childbearing, particularly in poorer countries, where much of the transmission is heterosexual, HIV/AIDS has become an important focus for our field," says Pebley. "Until we collectively work to improve the social and economic status of African populations and get the epidemic under control, it's going continue to be a huge problem."

The Bixby program's focus has reflected this larger view of population and reproductive health. "The issues supported by Bixby are key to a school of public health," says Dr. Roger Detels, professor of epidemiology and a member of the Bixby Steering Committee. "The program is particularly important because it provides funding for students to study overseas and gives them an opportunity to take courses that make them competent in reproductive public health and demography, both of which are important areas that not all schools of public health cover in-depth."

There is a significant unmet need for professionals who can work across the continuum of women's reproductive health, says Dr. Michael Lu, assistant professor of community health sciences at the school and of obstetrics and gynecology at UCLA's David Geffen School of Medicine. "Preconceptional family planning, interconceptional care, good quality prenatal care and safe pregnancy-related care are all things that could be done better," asserts Lu, a Bixby Steering Committee member. "The Bixby program has been valuable in increasing interest among the school's students in reproductive health, and providing opportunities for faculty and students to be involved in research and service activities related to reproductive health."

Many of the school's students who take part in the Bixby program pursue international careers, whether with non-governmental organizations, foundations, or as overseas employees of the United States government. Other students stay closer to home, seeking program development, education or advocacy roles

in the public or private sector. “There is such a range of interesting and important jobs, and many opportunities for students who specialize in this area, whether they want to work domestically or overseas,” says Tavrow.

Students can find faculty experts in a variety of topics and covering disparate geography. Tavrow specializes in reproductive health research in Africa: She is currently focusing on adolescents, evaluating a peer-education and -service program called Youth for Youth that aims to reach rural Kenyan school-age children on issues that include AIDS prevention, family planning and sexual violence. Pebley, who has also worked extensively overseas, is currently focused in Los Angeles: She co-directs the Los Angeles Family and Neighborhood Survey (L.A. FANS), a longitudinal study of the impact of neighborhoods on families in L.A. County. Among the topics being examined are the sexual activity and use of contraception and reproductive health services for the county’s teens, and specifically for its immigrant population. Dr. Gail Harrison heads a Bixby-supported project in the Middle East that disseminates safe birth practices to health professionals. With Bixby funding, Detels and Dr. Virginia Li have used the Internet to reach practitioners in rural areas of Yunnan Province, China, in an effort to improve the quality of contraceptive services, family planning programs, sexually transmitted disease services, and services promoting safe motherhood and women’s health.

In addition to funding faculty studies, Bixby has established a research mentorship program to give M.P.H. students an opportunity to work with faculty on projects related to population and reproductive health. Students receive a stipend based on the number of quarters they work with the faculty member. The Bixby Summer Internship Program, which sent Shellenberg and Maddock to Guatemala, has sponsored more than three dozen M.P.H. and pre-doctoral students’ international field experiences.

Support from the Bixby program enabled Rotrease Regan Yates (R.N., M.P.H. '05) to enhance her public health training with international research experiences she says she might not have otherwise had. “The financial burden of going abroad for an unpaid summer internship was of major concern,” she says. With financial assistance from the Bixby program, Regan Yates went to Bangladesh at the completion of her first year to work with Helen Keller International, studying maternal health in rural Bangladesh as well as assisting in the construction of a new maternal



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With Bixby funding, Rotrease Regan Yates (far left and above right) went to Bangladesh for an internship with Helen Keller International, studying maternal health and assisting with the development of a new assessment tool.





Bixby funding enabled students such as Kristen Shellenberg (above) to participate in the March for Women's Lives in Washington, D.C., in April 2004.

health assessment tool. In her second year, an award through the Bixby Research Mentorship Program enabled Regan Yates to work closely with Dr. Donald Morisky, professor of community health sciences, on Morisky's study of sexual behavior and STD/HIV transmission in the Philippines. The experiences convinced Regan Yates that she wanted to continue studying reproductive health. She is now in the school's Ph.D. program as a National Institute of Mental Health pre-doctoral trainee in HIV/AIDS research.

"It can be very difficult for students to get their foot in the door, because when you apply for international jobs, the first question is always how much international experience you have," says Dr. Pamina Gorbach, associate professor of epidemiology and a member of the Bixby Steering Committee. "If you're a young person without a lot of specific skills, unless you can volunteer – not an option for many students who are strapped for funds and can't afford to travel internationally for no pay – that first international experience can be elusive. The Bixby internship not only opens up opportunities for students who can't afford to fund their own international experience, it also allows opportunities to be created for students in resource-poor settings. When students have Bixby funding, it's easy for those of us who work internationally to place them in resource-poor countries that don't have the ability to pay students, but are willing to supervise students who come with their own support."

Gorbach has helped to find internships for Bixby-supported students in Bangladesh and Cambodia. "The experience of living in a different cultural setting and seeing firsthand how public health works in a developing country is something that just can't be learned from a textbook," she says. "When the students return, they have a new understanding of the things we're teaching."

Back at the school, the education that takes place in the classroom is enhanced in a number of ways. The Bixby Lecture Series features public health professionals from around the world speaking on global reproductive health policies and program developments. The Bixby Reproductive Health moderated listserv provides updates on news, job vacancies and local events concerning population and reproductive health to faculty, students, community members, and alumni. (To join, email ptavrow@ucla.edu.) The Bixby program also maintains an active Web site (<http://bixbyprogram.ph.ucla.edu>).

In 2004, the Bixby program co-hosted a two-day conference, "Youth Reproductive Health in a Controversial Climate: Reclaiming Strategies that Work," which brought together researchers, program managers, advocates and legislators. The program also provides funding for students to attend conferences and workshops on reproductive health, as well as advocacy events such as the lobbying in Sacramento undertaken by Maddock, Shellenberg and their peers.

After graduating in June, Maddock accepted a position at UC San Francisco's Bixby Center for Reproductive Health Research and Policy as an evaluator for the state's teen pregnancy prevention program and an after-school collaborative program at a west Oakland high school. "These programs couldn't be more opposite in size and structure, which keeps my days exciting," she says.

Shellenberg is now at The Bloomberg School of Public Health at Johns Hopkins University, pursuing a Dr.P.H. in the Department of Population and Family Health Sciences. "My involvement with the Bixby program helped to define my career path," she says. "I feel fortunate to have had the opportunity to interact so closely with faculty and fellow students who are also committed to ensuring that people all over the world are able to make safe and healthy decisions about their reproductive health."