

OMG Linkages

OMG Center for Collaborative Learning SUMMER 2010

NEW CONNECTIONS

OMG's long-standing dedication to diversity influenced the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) to recently select OMG Center as the national program office for New Connections.

New Connections is a diversity initiative that supports researchers and consultants from historically underrepresented groups in the health and healthcare fields. The program provides competitive grants to talented scholars — including people of color, first-generation college graduates, and those from low-income communities — who design a study that supports the objectives of RWJF programming teams. As the “new” New Connections’ program office, OMG manages the application and award process, the tracking of grants, the liaison relationship between grantees and RWJF programming teams, program-sponsored training and mentoring opportunities, and the development of a national network that supports program scholars at all stages of their careers.

Along with her colleagues, Debra J. Perez, RWJF Senior Program Officer in Research and Evaluation, spearheaded the creation of New Connections in 2005, a year after she joined the RWJF staff. This was simultaneous to the commitment of Dr. Risa Lavizzo-Mourey, RWJF President and CEO, to increase foundation diversity.

continued on page 2



New Connections Symposium at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation held June 16-18, 2010.



Speed mentoring at a fall Coaching Clinic. During speed mentoring sessions, a junior researcher spends 15 minutes paired with a senior researcher before rotating to the next mentor. During the workshop illustrated above, 75 researchers were mentored by 15 senior researchers.

As a new staff member, Debra discovered that there were few people of color engaged in foundation funded research. Team directors and program officers of the foundation's seven program areas wanted to work with more underrepresented researchers; they simply didn't know many. The idea behind New Connections was to use a small percent of the foundation's annual grant-making resources to support foundation-driven research by talented people of color and other underrepresented scholars. New Connections grantees would be encouraged to address key foundation issues and actively interact with program staff. Program officers would become acquainted with diverse scholars and feel comfortable turning to them in the future. As Debra explains, "People mistakenly think that New Connections is a program that works in isolation from other RWJF programs. In fact, from the beginning, New Connections was dedicated to enhancing diversity in all of RWJF's programs."

RWJF program staff value the perspectives of New Connections grantees because they add unique insights to research by offering diverse points of

view when framing culturally responsive questions, collecting data, and interpreting data. Edith Arrington, New Connections' deputy director notes, "Many Americans who are underserved and face healthcare challenges are members of the same groups we're supporting through New Connections. From research design to data analysis, recognizing and incorporating the diversity that exists in society contributes to quality research and program excellence."

New Connections annually awards 24-month research grants to junior investigators who have spent less than seven years in their field after receiving a Ph.D., and 12-month grants to mid-career consultants with 10 – 15 years of research or evaluation experience. Strong applicants make it clear that they'll seek to publish the research supported by the grant, and that they'll share their work at conferences and other academic and community forums. They also demonstrate an eagerness to interact with the foundation's program staff, value a relationship with the foundation, and are enthusiastic about taking advantage of all that's offered by the program including mentorships, collaborations, annual symposiums, and annual coach-

"People mistakenly think that New Connections is a program that works in isolation from other RWJF programs. In fact, from the beginning, New Connections was dedicated to enhancing diversity in all of RWJF's programs."

Debra J. Perez

ing events that support professional networking and career development.

In May this year, New Connections convened its first meta-networking meeting, which brought together funders and program staff from other organizations with similar diversity programs. Also, the program hosted the Fourth Annual New Connections symposium — a two-day event scheduled in June. The Symposium was chaired by Professor William Vega, Provost Professor at the University of Southern California, and included scientific sessions, a panel discussion of the state of health and healthcare disparities research today, a poster session, a mentoring session, and a grant-writing workshop.

New Connections is as interested in building a supportive career development network among diverse scholars as it is in sponsoring individual research projects. Currently, there are 650 researchers in the New Connections network. The goal is to have 1,000 diverse scholars in the network by 2012. The network is being developed through the program's events, partnerships with other organizations, program participation in professional meetings, social media, and the recruiting efforts of grantees and alumni.

To get involved, learn more about New Connections, or apply for a grant visit the program's website at www.rwjf-newconnections.org.



Meet a Few New Connections Grantees

Eighteen junior investigators and mid-career consultants are currently completing research projects supported by New Connections. Another 45 scholars are alumni of the program. Profiled below are four New Connections grantees:

Dr. Diana Grigsby-Toussaint is an assistant professor at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Interested in diabetes, food environments and dietary behaviors, and the social determinants of health, her New Connections award is supported through RWJF Healthy Eating Research, a national program connected to the foundation's Childhood Obesity portfolio. A New Connections junior investigator, Dr. Grigsby-Toussaint's research examines the relationship between obesity in young children and food promotion and marketing targeted to children in retail food store environments.

Amy K. Ferketich, Ph.D. is an associate professor at Ohio State University. A mid-career consultant, Dr. Ferketich's New Connections grant enabled her to examine the reach of clear air policies in Appalachia. Appalachian residents historically have suffered the burden of tobacco-associated diseases. Yet, the people of Appalachia are particularly resistant to the adoption of indoor clean air laws. The first in her family to receive a college education, Dr. Ferketich's research identified the locales in Appalachia that are covered by indoor air laws, and determined both the factors associated with the adoption of such laws and the forces that block the passage of clear indoor air ordinances. The study, which relied on both quantitative and qualitative methods, was a response to questions posed by the foundation's Public Health team.

Robert L. Dunigan, Ph.D. is a senior research associate at Brandeis University. As a junior investigator in the New Connections program, Dr. Dunigan designed a research project for RWJF's Vulnerable Populations portfolio. Noting that young, male, African-American and Latino law offenders are disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system and are at greater risk of homelessness, unemployment, drug abuse relapse, and recidivism, following incarceration, Dr. Dunigan's study examined the relationship of rates and determinants of engagement in substance abuse treatment while incarcerated; rates and determinants of engagement in post-release treatment; and, rates and determinants of length of time to recidivism.

Dr. Dharma E. Cortés is an instructor and senior research associate for the Cambridge Health Alliance, Harvard Medical School. As a mid-career consultant for New Connections, Dr. Cortés undertook a qualitative health insurance affordability study for RWJF's Coverage portfolio. The study was designed to better understand the personal financial impact of the 2006 Massachusetts Health Care Reform law among low-income Latinos. It examined the pathway Latinos followed to comply with the law, whether they could afford the subsidized health insurance premiums established by government, and what they did when they deemed their insurance premium unaffordable. Twenty interviews were conducted with Latinos who had obtained health insurance coverage after the enactment of the law.

Applying for a New Connections grant

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation research and evaluation program officers establish the research themes and questions to be addressed by each new grantee cohort. A call for grant proposals is announced once a year. Information pertaining to the next round of awards will be released by the end of 2010.

The application to New Connections and information about the program can be found at www.rwjf-newconnections.org. Scholars who apply to the program are asked to submit a budget and a brief, general description of the research project they wish to propose in response to the foundation's stated funding priorities. The initial proposals are reviewed by the program personnel, RWJF staff, and outside reviewers. Applicants with the strongest summary proposals are asked to submit a full proposal with a detailed narrative and a description of their research methodology. After the more detailed proposals are submitted, finalists are interviewed by phone. Members of the next cohort will be announced after the proposal submission process concludes in 2011.

Everyone who applies for a grant — including scholars who are not initially awarded a grant — is brought into the New Connections network and receives updates from the program staff. Applicants are also invited to the annual symposium and annual coaching clinic.

Above: Bringing together approximately 120 scholars, each New Connections symposium focuses on technical research subjects. New Connections also hosts a symposium and coaching clinic each year. All convenings offer opportunities for networking where a majority of the participants are members of historically underrepresented groups in the health and healthcare research fields.

The Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB): Building a positive peer-support community

In any given week, if you were to visit certain college campuses across the country, you might encounter a group of African-American and Latino male students in a meeting. At first, your attention might be drawn to the fact that each of the students is wearing a shirt and tie. After observing the business-like manner in which the young men run their meeting, and hearing the students talk about ways to be successful, you would realize you had just observed a powerful example of what can be accomplished when young men work together to achieve their goals. For these students, the goal is to receive a college degree and continue to make their mark in the world — in the workforce or by

furthering their graduate or professional education. These young men are members of the Student African American Brotherhood, or SAAB.

SAAB is an academic mentorship program for African-American and Latino young men. Dr. Tyrone Bledsoe founded SAAB in 1990 at Georgia Southwestern State University as his response to the educational statistics that consistently showed that African-American and Latino men graduated college at lower rates than their White counterparts. From its inception, SAAB's goal has been to increase college graduation rates for African-American and Latino males by helping to create a positive peer environment on students' school campuses.

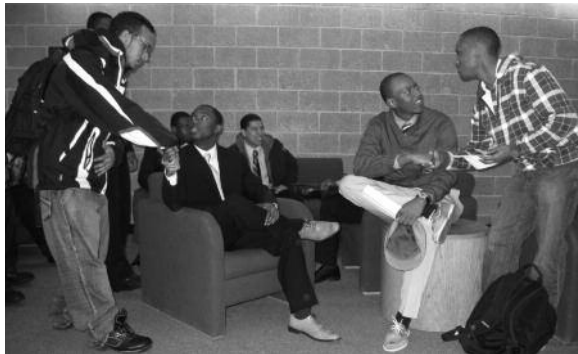
The organization helps its members excel academically, socially, culturally, and spiritually, and fosters a commitment to civic engagement through its chapters' emphasis on community service and mentoring. SAAB uses a multi-faceted approach to mentoring by promoting relationships between peers as well as faculty advisor-to-student mentoring

and older-student-to-younger-student mentoring. Headquartered at the University of Toledo for the past five years, SAAB has grown to over 200 chapters at the middle school, high school, and collegiate levels.

As SAAB's leadership establishes new chapters across the country, it recognizes a need for program effectiveness data to share with its stakeholders including funders, participating universities, and researchers. With funding from the Lumina Foundation for Education, SAAB engaged OMG Center to help build its organizational capacity to collect data on program effectiveness, and to evaluate SAAB's impact on college access and success.

In 2009, OMG Center conducted site visits to three of SAAB's collegiate chapters to learn more about SAAB at an organizational level, gain insight, and record the individual stories of the students. OMG is now working with SAAB's national leadership to develop a data collection system that chapters will use as part of their daily work.

Stony Brook University students gather after a SAAB meeting.



OMG Presents

Sarah Singer Quast and **Victoria Dougherty** presented the study "College Access and Success in Philadelphia: Moving Towards Systemic Efforts" to numerous groups in Philadelphia, including subcommittees of the **Mayor's Council for College and Career Success**, the **College Prep Roundtable**, and a group of school district lead staff. The study was conducted for the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. Victoria and Sarah also presented *Using Data to Drive Change: Building Systems for College Access and Success* to the

National Council of Higher Education Loan Programs via teleconference.

Victoria Dougherty presented "Building Systems for College Access and Success" at the **National College Access Network Annual Conference** in San Francisco in September 2009, and at the **Grantmakers for Education** conference in Chicago in October 2009, where she was joined by Jeanna Keller of the Lumina Foundation for Education and Susan Street of the Public Education Fund in Chattanooga, Tenn.

Meg Long presented at the **Council on Foundations** in April 2010 as part of the education track of the conference. Her co-presenters were Jeanna Keller from the Lumina Foundation for Education and Dan Challener, President of the Public Education Foundation. The topic was "Building Systems for College Access and Success: Using Data as a Lever for Systemic Reform."

In October 2009, **Victoria Dougherty** and **Emily Byrne** conducted evaluation training workshops on practical approaches

RWJF Evaluation Fellows: Increasing Diversity in Evaluation

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Evaluation Fellows program has entered its third year of programming. Managed by OMG Center for Collaborative Learning and Duquesne University, the program aims to build diversity in the evaluation field by training and nurturing a pipeline of diverse and historically under-represented post graduates and professionals from across the country. Also, it aims to catalyze institutional conversations about diversity in the hosting and placement organizations that work with Evaluation Fellows. The first cohort of Evaluation Fellows completed their fellowships in February 2010.

Katrina Herbert of Kalamazoo, Mich. was placed with the High/Scope Foundation for Educational Research for her fellowship year. She is returning to the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor where she completed a dual-degree masters program in social work and public health. As a recipient of the Rackham Merit Fellowship, Ms. Herbert's full tuition for her Ph.D. in public health will be covered by the University of Michigan.

Summer Jackson of Chicago completed her fellowship placement with the David and Lucille Packard Foundation in Los Altos, Calif. She has relocated to the Bay Area where she is an active member of the Bay Area Blacks in Philanthropy, and works with the behavioral health systems development and evaluation firm Davis Y. Ja & Associates in San Francisco.

Jill Jim of the Diné (Navajo) American Indian Tribe of the Reed People Clan,

and born of the Red-Running-Into-The-Water Clan completed her placement with the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation research department. Ms. Jim is now a member of the board of advisors to the fellowship program and is working with the Navajo Area Indian Health Service in Arizona.

Domingo J. Moronta of Harlem, New York, was placed with OMG Center for Collaborative Learning in Philadelphia. He is now working with a nonprofit youth organization in Brooklyn.

Introducing Cohort 2

We welcome our second cohort of the Evaluation Fellows program, which includes Monica Getahun, Natalie Alizaga, Denise Herrera, and Afabwaje Jatau. We also have two new placement sites, the National Cancer Institute (NCI) in Maryland and Decision Information Resources (DIR) in Texas.

Monica Getahun is a native of Ethiopia and a first generation immigrant to the United States. She earned an M.P.H. from Thomas Jefferson University. Ms. Getahun's fellowship placement is with OMG Center for Collaborative Learning.

Natalie Marie Alizaga of San Francisco is placed at Amherst H. Wilder Foundation this year. Ms. Alizaga earned her M.P.H. from the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor.

Denise E. Herrera of Albuquerque, N.M. holds a Ph.D. in public health education from the University of Texas at Austin. Her fellowship placement is with Decision Information Resources.

Afabwaje Jatau of Nigeria earned her M.P.H. from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, Gillings School of Global Public Health. Her fellowship placement is with the National Cancer Institute.

to program evaluation and the evaluation of partnerships to grantees of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation at the **Annual Conference of Local Funding Partners** in Stevenson, Wash.

Gerri Spilka, with Rodney Hopson of Duquesne University, led a "Think Tank on Diversifying the Evaluation Field" at the **American Evaluation Association's** meeting in Orlando, Fla. in November 2009. It was attended by 40 evaluation professionals from across the country.

Elena Tamas and **Anita Baker** presented evaluation findings on the **Youth Development Institute's Beacon's Young Adolescent Initiative** at the **National Beacons of Light Conference** in New York City in February 2010, and the **American Youth Policy Forum** in Washington, D.C. in March 2010.

Wendy Sedlak presented a paper at the **Urban Affairs Association** in Honolulu in March 2010. The paper, "It Ain't Pleasantville Just Yet: Trust, Social Disorder, and Unsafe Spaces in a Mixed-Income Neighborhood," was based on her dissertation research.

Michele Lempa and **Wendy Sedlak** presented "Using Social Network Analysis in Evaluation: Lessons Learned from the Field" at the **Eastern Evaluation Research Society** in April 2010.

Edith Arrington and **Howard Walters** presented on the New Connections program at the **23rd Annual National Conference on Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education** in June 2010.

OMG Projects & People

Strategy Advice

To move to the “next level” of excellence and to address dramatic changes in regional demographic shifts, **The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving** has engaged OMG (with Nancy Burd, Jackie Copeland Carson, and Patti Patrizi) to conduct a comprehensive strategic review. Following a review of the foundation’s core competencies and a regional trend analysis, the team will develop scenario options and a full implementation and learning strategy to position the foundation and its leadership for the next five years.

The **William Penn Foundation** engaged OMG Center as an advisor for the **ArtsRising** executive director and leadership team as they build and expand this initiative. Based on an 18-month community planning process managed by OMG, the William Penn Foundation launched the Arts for Youth initiative (now, ArtsRising). ArtsRising is a community-wide endeavor to improve and expand equitable access to arts education for all children in the Greater Philadelphia region.

OMG Center, with Michael Greenle — formerly of PennPraxis — is designing a digital-public-affairs- journalism strategy for the **William Penn Foundation**. Together, the team is formulating a strategy and launching a pilot. The team is also developing a full implementation plan and a theory of change, and along the way, is sharing progress and engaging stakeholders through a blog/web portal (<http://journalismcollaborative.wordpress.com/>).

Evaluation and Research

OMG is evaluating the implementation of the **Alliance for a Healthier Generation’s Competitive Foods Agreement**, a part of the organization’s childhood obesity prevention work. The eight-month evaluation compares healthy food choices offered to school students participating in the Alliance for a Healthier Generation’s Healthy Schools Program to food choices in non-participating schools. The evaluation also includes qualitative interviews with food industry participants to assess factors that could facilitate or challenge implementation of the Competitive Foods Agreement.

The strategic focus of the **Communities Learning in Partnership (CLIP)** initiative positions and supports community-level partnerships to shift, align, and improve postsecondary success policies and practices to increase the number of low-income young adults who complete a postsecondary degree or certification. OMG is evaluating CLIP’s planning phase across seven cities to identify lessons that could benefit other communities taking on postsecondary-success systems change. OMG is also assessing the contribution of the national intermediary and technical assistance providers. Evaluation methods include: telephone and in-person interviews, site visits, observations, online surveys, and document review.

With support from the **William Penn Foundation**, OMG is evaluating the **PA Early Learning Network (ELN)**, a comprehensive, unified data system developed by the State of Pennsylvania to assess individual-level early childhood outcomes across multiple programs. When fully implemented, the system will be used to inform state policy decisions, investments, and improvement efforts for early educational programs serving children from birth to third grade.

MANNA is a nonprofit organization that offers no-cost, home-delivered, medically appropriate meals to people at acute nutritional risk living in Eastern Pennsylvania and Southern New Jersey. Using health insurance claims records, OMG is conducting a research study comparing health outcomes and healthcare costs among MANNA clients to a comparison population not receiving MANNA services. The pilot project is part of a growing national effort to provide meals as a medical intervention to the chronically ill.

OMG is developing a multi-year evaluation of a university/community partnership in Macon, Ga. to revitalize the neighborhoods surrounding Mercer University and connect them to downtown Macon. **The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation** is supporting the newly created **College Hill Alliance** to work with local partners to improve civic engagement and amenities such as safety, walkability, aesthetics, and a sense of community in the College Hill Corridor area. The Knight Foundation also funded the Knight Neighborhood Challenge through the Community Foundation of Central Georgia to stimulate grassroots community engagement in the area’s revitalization.

OMG is leading an evaluation of the **St. Christopher’s Foundation for Children’s Farm to Families Initiative**. The initiative aims to create a distribution system for healthy foods for underserved families in North Philadelphia. The initiative also aims to amend local and state policies to promote access to healthy food among families living in North Philadelphia.

OMG is working with the **Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations** to conduct research on recently held public hearings regarding intergroup conflict and violence in Philadelphia public schools.

New Staff

Barbara Smith (1) joined OMG in June 2009 as our consulting controller. Barbara is an employee of Your Part-Time Controller, LLC, and is a CPA with over 30 years of experience in accounting and finance for small businesses, and an auditor of nonprofit organizations.

Jill Gurvey (2) joined OMG in December 2009 as senior analyst. She provides technical assistance and oversight to the quantitative components of evaluation and research projects. Jill comes to us most recently from Mathematica Policy Research in Princeton, N.J. where she was a systems analyst for their health group. Prior to her work at MPR, she was at the RAND Corporation in Santa Monica, Calif. as a health researcher.

Edith Arrington (3) also joined OMG in December 2009 as project manager and deputy director of New Connections: Increasing Diversity of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Programming, a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Before joining OMG, Edith worked with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and as a licensed psychologist and freelance writer with a focus on diversity and schools.

Monica Getahun (4) joined OMG in March 2010 as our second Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Evaluation Fellow. Monica has worked as a health planner of HIV/AIDS care and prevention services, and at the University of Pennsylvania’s Center for Clinical Biostatistics and Epidemiology as a research coordinator managing project-related tasks for an NIH-sponsored cancer trial.

Mohamed Jalloh (5) joined OMG in May 2010 as a project coordinator working with New Connections. He recently completed his M.P.H. with a focus on health behavior and health education from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Lynn Milchanoski (6) joined OMG in June 2010 as a project analyst. Prior to joining OMG, Lynn worked as the team leader of survey development for a mid-size management consultant company. Lynn has a bachelor’s degree in sociology with a minor in psychology from Saint Joseph’s University and a master’s degree in sociology from Temple University.

Sharon Norris-Shelton (7) is the program consultant for New Connections. Based in Detroit, Sharon has worked extensively with outreach and diversity programs in secondary and higher education for youth and adults.



Staff Promotions

OMG is pleased to announce that **Vivian Figueredo** was promoted from project manager to senior project manager in March 2010.

Victoria Dougherty, who gave birth to her third child in July, has recently transitioned from her role as deputy director of OMG. Over the past seven years, Victoria has contributed to OMG’s success in innumerable ways. Elaine Cassidy also transitioned from her role as senior project manager at OMG and will continue to work with us on a consultant basis.

New Board Members

We welcome three new board members: **Carleton H. Lee**, Director, Clinical Support Services, Covenant House, Inc. in Philadelphia; **J. Blaine Bonham**, Former Executive Vice President, Pennsylvania Horticultural Society in Philadelphia; and **Harris Steinberg**, Executive Director, PennPraxis, University of Pennsylvania.

OMG Center for Collaborative Learning



OMG CENTER FOR COLLABORATIVE LEARNING provides a broad range of consulting services to national philanthropic institutions and nonprofit and government organizations that address quality of life issues in communities. Established in Philadelphia in 1988, OMG's diverse team of professionals work throughout the country to develop innovative solutions to difficult challenges through evaluation, strategy and program development, and intermediary and capacity building services. We rely on a collaborative action research approach that builds new learning and problem solving capacities with our clients and also contributes knowledge to the fields in which we work. Areas of established expertise include children, youth and families; education; arts; leadership; community building; human service systems; the environment; and electronic media policy. For more information about OMG, please call us at 215.732.2200 or visit our website at www.omgcenter.org.



Top: Gerri Spilka, Meg Long, Julie Tarr, Tony Hall, Vivian Figuero, Emily Byrne
Middle: Tania Tasse-Guillen, Howard Walters, Wendy Sedlak, Elena Tamasas, Sarah Singer, Justin Piff, Steven Schuler, Tracey Sterling
Bottom: Barbara Smith, Jill Gurvey, Edith Arrington, Monica Getahun, Mohamed Jalloh, Lynn Milchanoski, Sharon Norris-Shelton

OMG Center for Collaborative Learning
1528 Walnut Street, Suite 805, Philadelphia, PA 19102
phone 215.732.2200 fax 215.732.8123 www.omgcenter.org

OMG