The Esperanza Project
Two Human Biology students bring hope to a school of handicapped children in Peru

When Erin Spokes visited Peru during her junior year of Stanford’s Human Biology program, she was surprised at the number of handicapped people living in the rural areas around the Amazon River.

“Nearly a quarter of the population has some sort of disability due to polio, snake bites, or accidents,” said Spokes. “And because the community was so poor, there were no government programs to help rehabilitate and reintegrate these people back into society.”

Spokes was so moved by the plight of these disabled villagers, that she brainstormed with her roommate, Julie (van Löbens Sels) Murray, on ways they could help. She knew from her first trip that the only hope for the younger children was to gain admittance into El Refugio de Esperanza (The Refuge of Hope), a vocational school for handicapped children in Pucallpa, Peru. This school not only teaches reading and writing, but it provides each child with a vocational skill—such as shoe repair, metal work, electronics, sewing, cosmetology, or sign making—so that these children can one day live independently. Watching this school operate, she was amazed at how much the staff accomplished on a shoestring budget but knew that so much more could be done with a reliable source of funding.

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Director’s Message
During the winter quarter of the Human Biology Core curriculum, our students explore the connections between life sciences and public policy. We not only dive headlong into the microscopic mechanisms of cell and developmental physiology, but we examine the macroscopic economic, social, and institutional factors that contribute to the many environmental and human health problems that we face today.

In this issue of our newsletter, we highlight the stories of Human Biology students and faculty who have applied elements of the Human Biology curriculum to real-world, public policy challenges. Two students create a documentary to help fund a vocational skill—such as shoe repair, metal work, electronics, sewing, cosmetology, or sign making—so that these children can one day live independently. Watching this school operate, she was amazed at how much the staff accomplished on a shoestring budget but knew that so much more could be done with a reliable source of funding.

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Esperanza Project

“...We had this idea that if we could create a documentary that showed potential contributors the incredible work that this school was doing, then it would be easier for them to raise enough money to pay their utility bills — and maybe even expand enrollment,” said Spokes.

With some careful planning, Spokes and Murray designed a documentary project that could be filmed and edited over the summer. Knowing that their $3,314 Summer Research Fellowship Grant from Stanford’s Center for Latin American Studies wouldn’t go far, they begged and borrowed for cameras, editing software, and computers. While Spokes did most of the filming, Murray worked on production planning and scripting the narration. A local Peruvian radio announcer and school volunteer agreed to do the voiceover narration, which was recorded in Spanish and subtitled in English.

Spokes and Murray’s documentary, which runs about 20 minutes, effectively captures the images, voices, and spirit of the school. It features interviews with the school’s founder, Pastor Victor Izquierdo, and several of his staff, many of whom are disabled by polio. The most moving interviews were with the graduates of the school. A single mother spoke about how the sewing skills she learned at El Refugio help her support her family. A disabled beautician is shown teaching her skills to others at the school. And a cobbler with both legs paralyzed by polio started weeping when he spoke about how the school helped him start his own shoe repair shop.

After the filming, Spokes and Murray returned to Stanford and spent nearly three weeks editing. Then, they used the rest of their grant money, as well as personal funds, to duplicate a box full of DVDs for the school to use and distribute in Peru. Because of their documentary, the Children of Promise International foundation formed a partnership with the Refuge of Hope School. This organization now uses the documentary, as well as some of Spokes and Murray’s research, to run a tax-deductible sponsorship program from their website, providing ongoing financial support to the school.

Since then, Spokes and Murray have returned to El Refugio de Esperanza several times, and they’ve enjoyed seeing the difference that their documentary made in the school. “The school added a dormitory so that they could take in more boarding students, they built a new outdoor assembly auditorium, and most important, they now have enough money to pay their utility bills,” said Spokes. Today, El Refugio de Esperanza teaches 400 students annually, including 50 boarders.

Spokes added, “Julie and I were very excited to be able to put our education and resources to good use. It’s been amazing to see the fruits of our project. The Human Biology Program was a valuable tool for us, specifically the sociological, anthropological, and psychological components of the curriculum. We felt more prepared to approach people from different cultures and life situations.”

Spokes and Murray graduated from Stanford in 2004. Spokes is now teaching Spanish at The King’s Academy, a private school in Sunnyvale, California. Murray is studying to be a nurse practitioner at the Yale School of Nursing, and she lives with her husband in Fairfield, CT. §

>>For more: http://www.promise.org/therefuge.html
Anne Firth Murray on Writing for Change

Anne Firth Murray, a consulting professor in Human Biology, recently shared her writing experiences at an informal gathering at the Stanford Writing Center. Besides talking about how and why she writes, she also offered testimony on the power of words to implement social change.

Her emphatic message to the students in the room was, “You can influence the world more than you realize, so go out and change things.”

And in 1987, Anne Firth Murray did just that. While she was working as a program officer at the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, she noticed how difficult it was for grassroots women’s organizations to obtain funding. She also observed that empowering women to address violence and injustice at a local level was often more effective than efforts by large multinational organizations. So she created the Global Fund for Women, which has become the largest foundation focused exclusively on the health and human rights of women, granting more than $42 million to local women’s groups in hundreds of countries. Because of her humanitarian work, in 2005 she was one of a group of 1,000 women nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

The distillation of what she has learned during this decade-long experience will soon be available in her upcoming book, Paradigm Found: Leading and Managing for Positive Change. Part memoir and part primer, this work aims to encourage both individuals and institutions to embrace change and take risks in order to address social issues.

Murray is also headlong into writing a new book that explores critical issues in international women’s health, such as ending gender-based violence, increasing access to education, and supporting reproductive rights. Using material she assembled for her Human Biology class on International Women’s Health, she’s finding that writing this type of book—more of a statement of issues rather than a memoir—is much more challenging.

“As an activist in an academic setting, it’s hard to settle on a voice—should I write as someone with a strong point of view or an academic who presents both sides of an issue?”

Murray also reflected on how writing often can’t be forced. Sometimes creative energies need to be focused on ‘doing’ rather than writing. And in those instances, she found it valuable to save notes, emails, and even poetry as source materials to draw upon.

Now, as she enters a phase where she is coaching others through teaching and writing, she emphasized the importance of clearly articulating a vision, both verbally and in writing, making sure that the passion for your work comes through.

“I have come to understand that ‘what’ we do in our lives is important, but that ‘the way we do our work’ is even more important in transforming our world,” said Murray. §

For a transcript of this talk, or information on Murray’s new book:
http://www.stanford.edu/group/howiwrite/
http://www.paradigmfound.org
HumBio Students Tackle Local Health Challenges

To help Stanford students apply classroom learning to real-world problems, the Human Biology department recently added a two-part service learning class to the curriculum. Led by Cathy Heaney, an Associate Professor (Teaching) in Psychology, “Community Health: Assessment and Planning” brings Stanford students together with non-profit agencies to address local health problems.

“This class gets the students outside of the Stanford bubble,” said Heaney. “They learn how agencies contribute to the health of communities, and they learn how nonprofit and local government organizations operate.”

During the first quarter, students worked with community partners to identify health issues. Last year childhood asthma and obesity were two of several public health problems they addressed.

 Collaborating with the East Palo Alto Asthma Task Force, the first thing the students did was to identify factors that contributed to the asthma problem in elementary schools. Using community health assessment techniques taught by Heaney, the students developed plans for collecting and analyzing data. Next, the team walked through the school, creating a list of possible environmental triggers for the condition.

During the data-gathering phase, students noted that heating ducts hadn’t been cleaned recently, that many fresh air intake vents were blocked by furniture, and that dusty old furniture and stuffed toys were adding airborne particulates into the ventilation system.

Second quarter, the students analyzed the data, assessed the costs of intervention, and presented their findings to community stakeholders, so that policies and plans could be formulated.

Lindsay Kay Borg worked on a team that studied childhood obesity in a neighboring county. With the incidence of childhood obesity increasing at alarming rates, her group explored whether conditions at area middle schools were contributing factors. Their rationale in focusing on middle schools was two-fold.

First, middle school is a time where children begin to make their own dietary decisions, with more choices available in cafeterias, snack bars, and vending machines. Second, many middle schools don’t provide opportunities for daily exercise.

For the obesity study, the student team assessed ten middle schools in San Mateo county, representing a range of geographical regions and socio-economic locales. They categorized the food in the snack bars and vending machines as low fat, high fat, low sugar, or high sugar. And they graded the quality of the schools’ recreational facilities. Finally, they interviewed school principals about their after-school recreational programs, and their use of food as a reward and exercise as punishment.

Though their sample size was small, they found a surprising relationship between socioeconomic status and the relative “healthiness” of a school’s environment: More affluent schools tended to offer healthier food options and better recreational facilities than poorer schools.

“I absolutely loved the field work involved in the Community Health Class,” said Borg. “And I liked the fact that the class gave me a taste of what it might be like to do public health research after school. It was one of the more work-intensive classes I’ve taken at Stanford, but also one of the most rewarding.”

Professor Heaney added, “So much about the traditional classroom experience is about knowledge acquisition. This class takes students to a later stage of learning, teaching the integration and application of this knowledge.” §

>>For more:
Inside the Core

Part I: Foundation in Health Policy

Addressing the many problems facing our world—from environmental degradation to AIDS, cancer, and health care costs—requires a multidisciplinary approach. Stanford’s Human Biology Core is a yearlong series of six classes taken in the sophomore year, covering genetics, evolution, ecology, society, biochemistry, psychology, neurobiology, physiology, and more. It provides a solid foundation from which students can launch careers in biological or social science, medicine, public health, law, education, business, or government. About 70% of Human Biology students go on to post-graduate programs within five years of graduation. More than 40% go to medical school, and many end up teaching at Stanford or other universities.

One of the strengths of the program is the commitment by Stanford faculty from diverse departments to offer an innovative, interdisciplinary education. Many of the professors have extensive experience in public health and health care policy, and a strong desire to share what they’ve learned.

One such professor is Donald Barr (M.D. ’73, Ph.D. ’93), an Associate Professor (Teaching) of Sociology who also works as a staff physician at Palo Alto Medical Foundation. In addition to teaching “Environmental and Health Policy Analysis” this quarter, he was instrumental in launching a $23.8 million drop-in center for homeless adults and children in the Bay Area. What he appreciates the most about the Human Biology curriculum is that it exposes students to public policy careers beyond traditional medicine. “We teach students how they can impact public health at a societal level, not just at an individual level,” said Barr.

Last year Barr had each of his students write a 750-word editorial on an environmental or health issue of their choosing. Students then submitted the essay to newspapers, and 15 of them were published. “The students learned how to concisely and persuasively use science to affect public policy,” said Barr.

Another fan of the HumBio Core is Philip R. Lee (MD ’48), a consulting professor in Human Biology who’s had a distinguished career in public health. Lee was the Assistant Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services under Presidents Lyndon B. Johnson (1965-1969) and Bill Clinton (1993-1997). He was also chancellor at UC-San Francisco, and he founded and directed the Institute for Health Policy Studies, where he now serves as senior scholar.

“I don’t know of any other undergraduate program that provides a better foundation for careers in public health and health policy,” said Lee.

Lee encourages Human Biology students interested in public health issues to participate in the Stanford in Washington program, which enables undergraduates to serve as interns in institutions such as the Senate, the House of Representatives, the Smithsonian Institution, the Food and Drug Administration, and the National Institutes of Health.

The sheer interdisciplinary scope of Stanford’s program, not to mention its longevity and spirit, is unmatched. (Next issue: Inside the Core Part II: Foundation in Environmental Policy)
Rosencranz attributed his knack for teaching to his efforts to make students feel welcome and comfortable.

Rosencranz, who specializes in international environmental policies and South Asian politics, has published nine books and over 70 articles. He received the Phi Beta Kappa of Northern California teaching award last May and the Stanford Phi Beta Kappa teaching award in June 2003, which is voted on by graduating seniors. He has taught at schools all around the world, including locally at Stanford, UC-Berkeley and the Golden Gate Law School in San Francisco, as well as in foreign countries such as India, Bali, Cambodia and Indonesia.

“Learning is interactive among all class members, including me. It comes from stretching the mind by critical analysis and assessment, not merely synthesizing what others have written.”

Faculty & Teaching Awards

Merton & Audrey Bernfield Director’s Award for Exceptional Contributions to the Program in Human Biology
Philip E. Lee

Associated Students of Stanford University (ASSU) Teacher of the Year
Armin Rosencranz

Human Biology Award for Excellence in Faculty Advising
Larry Zaroff

Colin S. Pittendrigh Award for Excellence in Teaching in Human Biology
Sundeep Bhat, Christina Giannikas, and Susan Canny

Goulder to Teach Environmental Core Class

Lawrence Goulder, a professor of environmental and resource economics, will teach Core fundamentals in Environmental Policy, Economics, Population Growth, and Health Policy this year. Goulder was awarded the first Catherine R. Kennedy and Daniel L. Grossman Fellow in Human Biology in 2004.

Goulder often adopts an interdisciplinary approach. “Science is crucial to understanding the nature of the environmental problems,” he says, but “it isn’t enough to know, for example, there’s a thinning ozone layer. We also need to know what public policies can reverse the problem, and which of these policy options might be most attractive.”

Goulder came to Stanford for graduate study in economics, taught at Harvard for seven years, then returned to Stanford in 1989. He’s currently working on U.S. policies, both at the national level and for California, to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases that lead to climate change. He’s also conducting research on policies to reduce gasoline consumption and automobile-generated air pollution.
HumBio Student
Selected as Rhodes Scholar

Tanya Ali Haj-Hassan (HumBio ’06) was among the 32 Americans who will attend Oxford University this fall as Rhodes Scholars. Haj-Hassan, 20, of Amman, Jordan, is majoring in Human Biology and is expecting to graduate in June. She plans to study for a master of science degree in global health science at Oxford so that she can pursue a career devoted to improving health care conditions in the Middle East.

“I am very grateful and feel very blessed,” Haj-Hassan said. “This was a program that I really wanted to pursue, and I’m glad I have the support to do it.”

In her essay for the Rhodes application, Haj-Hassan said she saw herself as a “child of the world” thanks to an old UNICEF T-shirt that was emblazoned with the slogan. Having been born to an American Christian mother and an Arab Muslim father, she said she always regarded [her] mixed identity as my greatest blessing. My upbringing has armed me with the languages, cultural understanding and vision to interconnect with people from diverse backgrounds and settings.”

Haj-Hassan is co-founder and co-president of the Coalition for Justice in the Middle East, a student organization, and served as vice president of the Muslim Student Awareness Network at Stanford. She has volunteered as a chaplain at Stanford Hospital and conducted research on neonatal mortality in Jordan.

Haj-Hassan said the program in Global Health Science at Oxford would provide the framework for studying the intersecting fields of public health and international development in the developing world. She said she is not sure what exact job she would like to do after her studies but that she sees herself working on health issues somewhere in the Middle East. §

Fulbright Program Internship in Honduras

Jennifer Miller (HumBio ’06) was among 12 Stanford graduates awarded a Fulbright grant for the 2005-2006 academic year. The Fulbright Program is designed to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and other countries by providing grantees with research funding for a yearlong project of their choosing.

Miller is using her grant to conduct research on food security and nutrition in Honduras. As part of this project, she created the Roatan Clinical and Public Health Internship in Honduras (RCPHI) for undergraduates and medical students. Through one-month to three-month internships, R.C.P.H.I. interns have the opportunity to learn about pediatric medicine while working alongside American and Honduran doctors, residents, medical students, nurses, and other health care workers. §

>>For more: http://rcphi.beagooddoctor.org/
Alumni News

Kwo Wins Soros Fellowship

Elizabeth Kwo (HumBio ’04) just received a Paul and Daisy Soros Fellowships for New Americans. The fellowship, funded by a $50 million grant from the Hungarian immigrants for which it was named, was established in 1997 and is awarded annually to naturalized citizens, resident aliens or the children of naturalized citizens studying in the United States. Thirty students across the country are selected for fellowships each year. This year, the 30 students were selected out of a pool of nearly 800. According to a press release from the organization, Soros fellows receive the $20,000 stipend and half of their graduate school tuitions for up to two years. §

Nnamani Recognized in Volleyball

Ogonna Nnamani (HumBio ’05), U.S. Olympian and MVP of the 2005 Stanford women’s volleyball national championship team, was recognized last year as the Collegiate Woman Athlete of the Year. In addition to making a name for herself on the national level, Nnamani has secured her place in Stanford record books for years to come. She recorded 823 kills during the Cardinal’s 2004-2005 campaign, a single-season record for Stanford and the Pac-10 Conference. Additionally, Nnamani has dished out 2,450 career kills, also a Pac-10 record. Nnamani graduated from Stanford last year, receiving her bachelor of arts in the Program in Human Biology. This year she is playing professional volleyball in Puerto Rico. §

HumBio Reading List

Book recommendations by the Human Biology faculty.

The Great Influenza: The Epic Story of the Deadliest Plague in History by John M. Barry

The Beak of the Finch: A Story of Evolution in Our Time by Jonathan Weiner

Quinine: Malaria and the Quest for a Cure That Changed the World by Fiammetta Rocco

Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed by Jared Diamond

Comings & Goings

Vincent Siciliano (HumBio ’72), President and CEO of 1st Pacific Bank of California, recently accepted the Peter Barron Stark & Associates’ “Workplace Excellence” award and Findley Report’s De Novo Bank of the Year award (for banks less than five years old). He can be reached at avs10@pacbell.net. §

Director’s Message

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Peruvian school for the handicapped. Another student group explores factors contributing to childhood obesity. And a professor shares her experiences in creating a global foundation focused on women’s health issues.

Armed with tools for analyzing and understanding both the microscopic and macroscopic aspects of human biology and sociology, our students are better equipped to take on the challenges that our society will face in the future. §
**Alumni Opinion Poll**
The Program in Human Biology has established awards to recognize undergraduates in the areas of Public Interest Advocacy, Student Innovation, Academic Excellence, Excellence in Honors Research, Excellence in Research Related to Families and Children, and Excellence in Research Related to Neuroscience.

**Should Human Biology continue to award and recognize an undergraduate in Excellence related to International Health?**

Last year the Program awarded undergraduates Howard Chiou and Hannah Leslie the first ever Paul Basch International Health Award. Chiou was honored for his research project, “Perceptions of HIV Risk in Taipei.” Leslie was honored for her research paper, “The Cuban Health Care System and Women's Health in Havana.”

The namesake for the award is the late Paul Frederick Basch, who taught Human Biology classes on Parasitology and International Health. Basch was the author of five books, including one of the most widely used textbooks on International Health. Paul was an outstanding teacher, mentor, scholar, colleague, humorist, and author.

We are seeking alumni feedback for this student award in International Health and any suggestions for sustainable funding.

Please email your feedback to humbiodirector@stanford.edu

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**Human Biology Donors List**

On behalf of everyone involved in the Human Biology Program, we thank our valued donors for their continued generosity. Their support helps Human Biology and the School of Humanities and Sciences attract the best students and faculty.

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Please send omissions to lindab@stanford.edu

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Our alumni, students, and faculty are a community focused on making a difference in the world. Your contributions to our research, education, people, and programs help make Human Biology graduates a driving force in tackling the many problems facing humanity. You can help build on this tradition with contributions and the sharing of your inspirational stories.

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