



# Kellogg Health Scholars

Connecting Academe, Community, and Policy

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## 2009-2011 Kellogg Health Scholars: Multidisciplinary Track



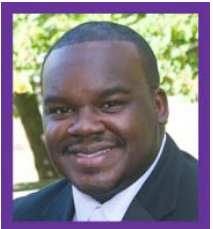
**LaKeisha Batts, PhD Candidate** - LaKeisha Batts will complete her Ph.D. in Immunology from The Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences at Baylor College of Medicine in August 2009. She obtained a B.A. in Biology from Rice University in Houston, TX in 2002. Her dissertation research focuses on microRNAs that regulate the development of T cells and their role in the asthmatic response. Her previous experiences include: observing health outcomes in a rural health clinic (Carterville Family Practice Clinic, Carterville, IL), investigating the pathogenic mechanisms of *Candida albicans* (yeast) in immune compromised individuals (Rice University, Houston, TX) and evaluating mechanisms of T cell death in African-Americans and Caucasians (Baylor College of Medicine, Houston, TX). She is particularly interested in using her biomedical research background to investigate the influence of the immune system on breast tumor development in African-American and Caucasian women. She hopes to identify biomarkers that can be used as tools for diagnosis and therapeutic treatments. LaKeisha will be at the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center site in the Center for Research on Minority Health/Health Disparities Research, Education and Training Consortium.

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**Shelly Hovick, PhD Candidate** - Shelly Hovick will graduate in August 2009 from the University of Georgia with a PhD in Communication. She completed her M.A. at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and B.A. at the University of Iowa. Her scholarly interests lie in the area of health communication. She is interested in understanding how communication can be used as a vehicle to reduce health and communication disparities, looking specifically at how individuals seek and process health information. Before returning to graduate school she worked for the Hunger Task Force in Milwaukee as a community educator. While at UGA she served as a research assistant for the Southern Center for Communication, Health and Poverty. At the Southern Center she was involved in research understanding the degree to which low-income people feel susceptible to multiple health risks, desire health information, and have adopted health protective behaviors. Her dissertation builds on this interest in health information by exploring the barriers and facilitators to communication of family health histories. Shelly will be a Kellogg Health Scholar at the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center Site in the Center for Research on Minority Health/Health Disparities Research, Education, and Training Consortium.

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**Darrell Hudson, PhD Candidate** - Darrell Hudson will receive his PhD in Health Behavior and Health Education from the University of Michigan School of Public Health, where he also received his MPH. He received a BA in Psychology from Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia in 2002. His dissertation work is primarily geared towards improving the preciseness in which socioeconomic position (SEP) is measured across race and considers how benefits generally considered conferred with higher SEP may not necessarily increase the health status of African Americans due to unique socially patterned stressors such as racial discrimination. As a Kellogg Health Scholar, Darrell plans to build upon his dissertation research in three main areas: 1) the continued examination of heterogeneity in SEP across racial groups in the United States; 2) the application of lifecourse theory to understanding how the process of upward social mobility could be deleterious to the health of African Americans; 3) the development of a deeper understanding of how biological pathways translate social experiences such as racial discrimination into mental disorder and diminished physical health, particularly the mechanisms that may undermine the expected salubrious effects of increased SEP among upwardly mobile African Americans. Darrell will be at the University of California, San Francisco site.

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**Sze "Sam" Liu, PhD Candidate** - Sze "Sam" Liu is currently completing requirements for her PhD in Epidemiology from Brown University, Program in Public Health. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree with a double major in Biology and Psychology from Cornell University and a Master's in Public Health in Epidemiology from Columbia University. Prior to moving to Providence for graduate school, Sam worked on tuberculosis and tobacco control related-projects at the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. Her dissertation research quantifies the effect of school desegregation policy on reducing racial disparities in adolescent birth rates in the US. Sam plans to continue to investigate how school desegregation and resegregation trends in recent years affected the health of the US population. Her general research interests include examining how educational quality affects health, investigating the role of social and physical environmental factors in creating health disparities, and understanding the health consequences of governmental social policy.

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**Dara Mendez, PhD Candidate** - Dara Mendez will receive her PhD in Maternal and Child Health with a specialization in Perinatal Epidemiology at the University of North Carolina's (UNC) Gillings School of Global Public Health. She obtained her MPH in Maternal and Child Health from UNC in 2005 and her BA in Sociology/Anthropology Pre-Med from Spelman College in 2002. Dara's work and research experience includes program evaluation and assessment of children's health programs, program development, racial/ethnic disparities in infant health outcomes, reproductive health, and environmental health and justice. She received a pre-doctoral grant from the National

Institutes of Health to complete her doctoral studies and dissertation research investigating the effects of institutional racism, perceived discrimination and other social stressors on the risk of preterm birth. Dara has also worked on women's and children's health issues in Jamaica, South African and Kenya. Her additional research interests include examining neighborhood context and health, community-based participatory research techniques and the effects of slavery on current health disparities in the US. Dara plans to continue her research in examining institutional racism and other social determinants as major contributing factors to disparities and the implications of current health programs and policies in eliminating health disparities. Dara will be at the University of Pittsburgh site.

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**Renee Walker, PhD Candidate** - Renee Walker will receive her Doctorate of Public Health (DrPH) in Behavioral and Community Health Sciences in June 2009 from the University of Pittsburgh. Renee also holds a MPH from Drexel University in Community Health and Prevention and a BA in Biology from Lake Forest College (Lake Forest, IL). Her research interests are in the roles of residential neighborhood context as a determinant of health, particularly the neighborhood food environment (types of food stores, types of food offered, affordability, etc.) and the implications for overweight and obesity. Renee's previous health disparities research includes the use of qualitative methodologies to: 1. understand perceptions of diabetes self-management among residents of a

low-income community in Philadelphia, and 2. explore facilitators and barriers to proper diet and nutrition among older African American participants in an exercise and nutrition program. Renee's current research utilizes Concept Mapping to explore perceptions of factors that go into food buying practices among low-income, urban residents of two neighborhoods with different access to large chain supermarkets. Her research seeks to fill some of the gaps regarding our understanding of how neighborhood context is related to healthy eating practices. Renee will be a Kellogg Health Scholar at the Harvard School of Public Health.