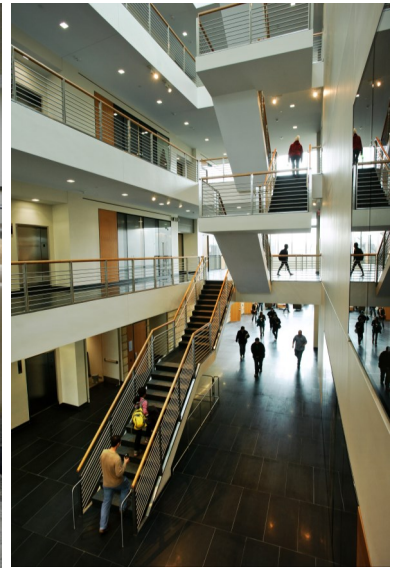




THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA COLLEGE OF PUBLIC HEALTH

# Department of Health Management & Policy Newsletter

Winter 2015



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Keith Mueller, PhD  
Gerhard Hartman Professor and  
Head, Department of Health  
Management and Policy

## Letter from the Department Head

As we approach the start of a new year, we have many reasons to celebrate in the Department of Health Management and Policy. More than 35 students completed their graduate degrees in 2014 across all programs of the department (MHA, PhD, MPH with policy concentration). They are all beginning their professional careers, continuing the department's 100% placement rate. Our faculty continue to be incredibly productive researchers whose work translates into policy and practice developments affecting care provided by small hospitals, services provided to an aging population, health of children, continuation of services by safety net providers, and changes in the organization of health systems and distribution of their services.

We welcome the Rural Policy Research Institute (RUPRI) to the College of Public Health. RUPRI's President and CEO Charles Fluharty is our newest faculty member, a Clinical Professor. RUPRI has a broad-based portfolio that includes a state policy initiative, a human services panel, path-breaking research and policy analysis on wealth creation and poverty in rural places, international policy analysis and research, and fostering the next generation of rural leaders and entrepreneurs through special programs including promoting the arts in rural communities.

A new Executive Masters in Health Administration was launched with a cohort of 11 students in September

2014. This program includes the same curriculum as our MHA, adjusted slightly to credit the experience the students have acquired in their current positions in healthcare organizations. Students are completing semester courses in five-week "sprints," one course at a time, on site here in our building. I had the pleasure of co-teaching (with Dr. Clint MacKinney) the first class in this program and can report that it is intense for both the students and the instructors, but a fantastic experience for all!

The department is well positioned to be a leader in training the next generation of leaders in health administration, health policy, and health services research. We begin a new Masters Degree in Health Policy next year, and our PhD program is attracting top young scholars. The MHA program undergoes continuous quality improvement to stay current with the rapid changes occurring in health care organization, finance, and delivery. Our research contributes to those new developments. We will hire two new faculty in 2015, enabling us to keep pace with increased demand for the research and instruction offered by the department.

*Keith J. Mueller*

## Keep us updated!

We're constantly updating our department's Alumni Directory, and we want to make sure that your information is correct. If you think that your contact information has changed since the last time we released it, please visit our website and complete the "[Update Your Info](#)" form.

## Message from the Alumni Board

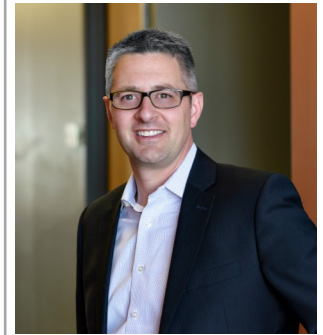
Happy Holidays from the HMP Alumni Board! I hope 2014 has brought much personal happiness and professional success.

The HMP program continues to do what it does best – produce healthcare leaders of the future. Students are actively pursuing summer internships and jobs/fellowships. My hope is that many of you, as alumni, are accepting these applications! If not, please remember the importance of mentoring our new graduates and contact Jean Sheeley

([jean-sheeley@uiowa.edu](mailto:jean-sheeley@uiowa.edu)) to sponsor an intern or fellow today.

If you are interested in becoming more involved with the HMP Alumni Board, we are actively recruiting new members. Please send me a quick note at [cklitgaard@medirev.com](mailto:cklitgaard@medirev.com) for more information.

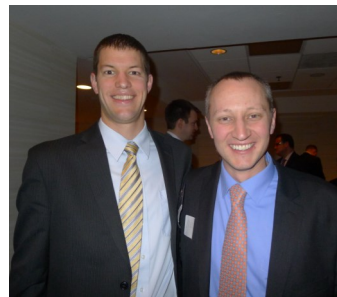
Go Hawks!  
Chris



Chris Klitgaard, '99  
CEO, MediRev



Eric Jukkala, '10, Carrie Miller, '09, Brett Norell, '01, Kara Schutts, '09, Mark Brown, '05, Anna Barth, '06, Andy Barth, '06.



Scott Kallemeyn, '06, Bren Lowe, '06.



Ryan Landi, '12, Scott Kent, '93.



Anthon Brooks, '95, Emily O'Banion, '00, Chad Wolbers, '99.



Lance Clark, 2<sup>nd</sup> Year MHA, Erin Moen, '14, Luke Nelson, 2<sup>nd</sup> Year MHA, Claire Johnson, '14.

## Mark your calendars!

UI HMP Alumni Reception at the  
2015 ACHE Congress

Date: Tuesday, March 17, 2015

Time: 6:00 - 7:30 p.m.

Location: Room TBD

Hilton Chicago



Thomas E. Vaughn, PhD  
Director of MHA Program

## MHA Program Update

Hello from the MHA Program!

This fall we welcomed 28 students into the MHA program with representation from two other countries (Greece and Nigeria) and seven states (Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, Texas and Wisconsin). As usual, it was a busy fall with orientation, a number of special events on campus, and first-year student trips, as well as the postgraduate fellowship/job search for second and third-year students. The students managed to fit in classes as well. The first-year students are actively seeking summer internship

placement and plan to take full advantage of their upcoming break. You may receive an email from a student to schedule a call or visit to discuss your career path, your current role, and opportunities at your organization.

So far we've had a number of successful placements for December 2014 and May 2015 graduates: CHI Franciscan, Deloitte Consulting, Emory Management Training Program, HCA in Nashville and Chattanooga, TN, Henry Ford Health System, Hospital Sisters Health System, Kaiser Permanente, Oregon Health & Science University,

Providence Health & Services, Trinity Mercy, University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics, and UnityPoint Health.

At the programmatic level, we have revised our mission statement to better reflect our aspirations for the students in the rapidly evolving health care field. The new statement is: *"The MHA program provides a didactic curriculum and applied learning experiences that develop pre-professionals with demonstrated leadership potential who will assume entry level management positions in health care organizations (HCOs) and become transformative leaders of the field."*

We are also increasing training in population health and continue to identify opportunities to strengthen student problem solving and process improvement skills.

We are reviewing applications for Fall 2015 and will hold interviews January 28-30, February 6 and 13, 2015. We anticipate another strong incoming class.

As always, I thank the alumni and friends of the program for your ongoing support of the MHA Program. Your service to the students as guest speakers, mentors, preceptors, hosts on trips, mock interviewers, participants in special events, and the admissions interviewers all contribute to developing the next cohort of low-educated health care leaders.

Go Hawks!  
Tom

## EMHA Program Update

The inaugural cohort of 11 Executive MHA students began in late August with the Health Management course taught by Drs. Mueller and MacKinney. They have now completed the first three of 17 courses in the curriculum, demonstrating high energy and collaboration within this diverse group of managers and clinicians.

We are now accepting applications for the 2015 start group of 16 students. We will add a second campus in Des Moines in fall of 2016 when total enrollment will increase to 20 students. Please contact Ian Montgomery ([ian-montgomery@uiowa.edu](mailto:ian-montgomery@uiowa.edu)) if you have questions or prospective students.



Ian Montgomery, '79  
EMHA Program Director



THE UNIVERSITY  
OF IOWA  
College of Public Health

## Executive Master of Health Administration

ADVANCING TO LEADERSHIP

**BUILDING** on the strengths and accreditation of Iowa's long-standing MHA Program and over 1,000 alumni.

**MEETING** the need for leadership to transform healthcare financing and delivery in dynamic environments.

**PROVIDING** working professionals with advanced knowledge and skills in healthcare management.

**POSITIONING** experienced professionals to become effective healthcare leaders.

The EMHA requires 45 hours of course credit and will usually be achieved within two years. Courses are taught singly by experienced faculty on campus and supplemented by online resources. The teaching approach is case- and team-focused, typically with three courses in the Spring and Fall semesters and one course both Summer semesters.

For more information, visit [cph.uiowa.edu/emha](http://cph.uiowa.edu/emha)



Brian Kaskie, PhD  
Director of MPH in  
Policy Program

## MS & MPH Program Update

Greetings from the Health Policy Program!

This has been another busy and productive academic year for students and faculty who are interested in health policy. First, we received approval from the Iowa Board of Regents to launch a new MS degree program in health policy. This new degree program complements our department's MPH and MHA degrees by providing students with content knowledge and methodological skills most critical to health policy analysis and research. The

goal of the MS degree in Health Policy is to prepare graduates for careers in academic institutions, government agencies, and other organizations explicitly involved with health policy, where a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodological skills are sought. To learn more about us, please visit the newly updated information on the department website.

The MPH in Policy had three graduates in December 2014 - Jessica Larson, MHA/MPH, Dominica Rehbein, MHA/MPH, and Erik Skinner, MPH. Jessica came to Iowa City from Seattle and will be returning to the Pacific Northwest for a fellowship at Providence Health and Services. Jessica's MPH practicum focusing on the local homeless population was featured in the Press Citizen: <http://www.press-citizen.com/story/news/local/2014/11/19/johnson-county-homeless-misconceptions/19287725/>.

Dominica completed her MPH practicum by exploring environmental sustainability at Mercy Hospital in Iowa City. She has worked as a research assistant in the College of Public Health throughout her graduate studies and will continue her role on two grants throughout the spring. She is originally from Minnesota, but will move to Detroit in the summer of 2015 to start an administrative fellowship with Henry Ford Health System.

Keith Mueller continued to expand the RUPRI Center for Rural Health Policy Analysis, taking on several new contracts that provide timely analysis to federal and state health policy makers. The

national RUPRI Panel recently published The High Performance Rural Health Care System of the Future, providing a blueprint on how to navigate through the continued implementation of the Affordable Care Act. Perhaps more importantly, RUPRI has taken a key role in offering graduate research assistantships and other opportunities for students most interested in health policy. On top of that, Keith spent this past semester convening his graduate seminar in health policy much to the delight of our graduate students who want to know what is happening right now in health policy.

Speaking of right now in health policy, Chris Atchison successfully launched the Contemporary Issues in Health Policy course, a monthly series featuring local and state level health policy topics. Previous presentations have been made by Senator Joe Bolkcom, Stacey Cyphert, and Pete Damiano among others. Keep an eye out for this first -Thursday-of-the-month event during the fall and spring semesters. Also, you should keep an eye out for the next Rebalancing Health Care in the Heartland conference in Des Moines. This year's meeting featured national and state level policy experts providing current perspectives on health reform, and also showcased the latest innovations from the University of Iowa Health Sciences Colleges. Check it out at <http://rebalancinghealthcare.uiowa.edu>.

Assistant Professor Brad Wright continues to make great contributions to the world of health policy. Brad launched his course "Health Policy Analysis" earlier this year with 12 students enrolled. He also has authored several outstanding manuscripts in health policy over the last few years. His scholarship concerns disparities in health and health care delivery, and health politics and policy related to vulnerable populations and the health care safety net. His work has appeared in well-regarded journals such as Health Affairs and the Journal of Health Politics, Policy & Law. You should check out his "Wright on Health" blog at <http://www.healthpolicyanalysis.com>.

Remember to learn more about us by going to:

<http://www.public-health.uiowa.edu/mph-in-policy/>

And yes, we certainly are interested in hearing your thoughts about how to make it better!

Brian

## PhD Program Update - Program Director Changes Hands



Marcia Ward, PhD

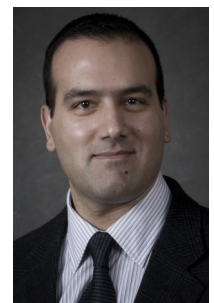
The New Year marks the transition of the role of Director of the PhD Program and Chair of the PhD Quality Improvement Committee from Marcia Ward, PhD to George Wehby, PhD.

Professor Ward has directed the PhD program since 1999. Over the past 15 years she has led multiple developments in the program including implementing PhD Annual Professional Development Reviews, faculty mentorship teams, Preliminary Exams, and the three-paper model option for dissertations.

It is particularly appropriate that George Wehby take over as PhD Program Director because he graduated with a PhD from the program in 2006. As such, he has the novel perspective of successfully matriculating from the PhD program and subsequently joining the Department of

Health Management and Policy as primary faculty in 2008. Since joining the faculty, Dr. Wehby has taken an active role in the PhD Quality Improvement Committee, helping to transition the PhD program to include three focus areas of concentration.

Dr. Ward notes the many wonderful experiences she has had mentoring the outstanding students who have been in the PhD program over the past decade and a half. While she will miss the role she has had in the program, she is delighted that the program director position is passing to someone so uniquely qualified.



George Wehby, PhD

## 2014 Healthcare Symposium

The 36th Annual Iowa Executive Healthcare Symposium took place October 30 and 31. The Symposium provided students an opportunity to hear lectures on prominent health care topics and to meet alumni and executives across the country. The two-day event featured two keynote speakers and six workshop presentations for students and executives.

Symposium kicked off on Thursday afternoon at the College of Public Health building with William Jessee, MD as the keynote speaker. Dr. Jessee gave a lecture on integrated healthcare strategies and answered questions from the audience. A reception followed in the Kinnick Stadium press box, which was a great opportunity for students to meet executives and learn about their experiences in the field.

Symposium continued on Friday at the Sheraton Hotel in downtown Iowa City. The morning started with a choice of two workshop sessions, each with three different topics. The topics ranged from population health strategies to successful

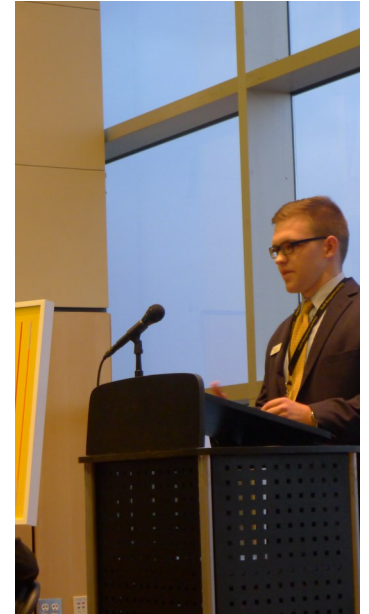
physician integration into healthcare systems. Following the workshops TheHappyMD.com CEO, Dike Drummond gave an interactive presentation on collaborative leadership in times of change. The presentation focused on how health care executives can work to improve their relationships with physicians and the benefits for their organizations.

We had an excellent turnout for Symposium this year - more than 187 students and healthcare executives attended. This was a great opportunity for students to network with practicing healthcare executives. Students were given a list of attendees in advance so they could research their respective organizations and network better with them during the event. The workshops were a great experience for students to obtain an outside perspective on major health care initiatives.

Thank you to all of those who helped make this an exceptional experience for students and executives alike, especially our presenters. We hope to see everyone back next year!



LEFT:  
Jim Atty, '09,  
Chris Klitgaard, '99 and  
Samuel Levey '59



RIGHT:  
Matthew Belanger,  
2<sup>nd</sup> Year MHA/MBA



LEFT:  
Joe LeValley and  
Brad Wright

RIGHT:  
Jared Leshner and  
Ian Montgomery, '79



## 2014 Scholarship Recipients

### The Mary Kay and Stephen E. Corbeil Scholarship

- Patrick Rafferty
- Lance Clark
- Jared Leshar

### The Adrienne Astolfi Eddins Health Management Scholarship

- Kate Swanic

### The John and Wendy Boardman/Amenity Foundation Exceeding Expectations (E<sup>2</sup>) Scholarship

- Sharese Van Sloten

### The Peg and Richard Breon Scholarship

- Abbey Even

### Charles R. Linden Scholarship

- Katherine Read

### Ian and Lori Montgomery Medical Group Management Scholarship

- Jared Leshar

### The Marilyn and Lawrence Prybil Scholarship

- Dominica Rehbein

### David Clapsaddle Scholarship

- Luke Nelson

### MediRevv Scholarship

- Michael Baca

### MPH in Policy Awards

- Aaron Horsfield
- Mike Lightbody



### SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

FRONT ROW: Mike Lightbody, Lance Clark, Jared Leshar, Kate Swanic, Dominica Rehbein, Patrick Rafferty  
 BACK ROW: Sharese Van Sloten, Aaron Horsfield, Katherine Read, Abbey Even, Michael Baca  
 NOT PICTURED: Luke Nelson

Stay connected with the program through our social media platforms!



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hmpstudentblog.  
blogspot.com



LinkedIn Group:  
University of Iowa MHA



Follow us on Twitter  
@uiowahmp

### **HMP Orientation 2014 by Jeralyn Westercamp, 1<sup>st</sup> Year MHA**

You know it's that time of year again when the Pumpkin Spice Latte appears: time for orientation. It can inspire excitement, dread, nervousness, trepidation ~ a potent mix of emotions for our new beginning in the field of healthcare. It's a dynamic and ever-changing field so it is fitting that our orientation also be dynamic!

Back in yesteryear (those undergraduate years that seem so long ago), I remember the fear and excitement as we paraded around campus with student ID cards swinging from our lanyards ~ so much to learn and take in. This time around, there were the same feelings.

Prior to orientation, students did not know each other. Of course, we were peppered with important information relating to our diverse prior professional and academic careers. Some of us started graduate school straight out of undergraduate college while others came from professional careers. Some of us are Iowa natives, some are from other states, and others are from countries outside of the U.S. Among the business activities of orientation, we had the opportunity to meet and hear from senior leadership at the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics.

But, by participating in team-building activities, picnics, and socials with alumni and current students – all organized by the HMP Student Services staff – we spent a lot of time on a personal level. While it may have seemed the differences outweigh the similarities, orientation helped prove this wrong. We learned about the passions and excitement we all share. Our class quickly bonded. We started our innovative Iowa HMP orientation as strangers and ended as friends.

As of this writing, we have just completed our first week of graduate school classes. We are ready to accept the challenges that come with working in healthcare thanks to the bonds between students, mentors, and the assistance of the Iowa HMP Program!





## Speed Networking 2014 by Kate Swanic, 1<sup>st</sup> Year MHA

Networking. To some, such a term represents a mix of awkward conversations and long, almost agonizing, pauses. For me and my fellow students, such were the experiences we expected as we made our way to Brown Deer Golf Course on the night of September 11. Although I have always considered myself strong in the art of conversation, I was nervous. We finally had the opportunity to meet face to face with individuals who once stood in our shoes and who we aspire to become someday.

As alumni began filtering in, students greeted them. From there, the evening was a success. Student and alumni gathered together in one room to simply converse. One of the most important aspects of the night, for me, was that I could engage with these professionals in a no-pressure environment. As students, we could test our skills and build relationships with those who undoubtedly understand us best in our current position as students. I enjoyed each of the unique conversations I had, whether it was discussing hospital systems in my home state of Michigan or the current healthcare crisis in the Ukraine. These were the types of conversations I can go home and reflect on, as they were both supplemental to my current education and to my personal interests. Best of all, I didn't even have to fall back on the variety of neutral topics I had prepared in case a conversation went blank! If you are curious, the topic of hors d'oeuvres did come up in conversation. I mean, they were that good, and food of that standard must be discussed!



Mark Willis, '12, Chip Rank, Mitch Cote



Alison Amendola, '13, and Steven Johnson

## Golf Outing 2014 by Mitch Cote, 1<sup>st</sup> Year MHA

Greetings! The past few weeks in Iowa City have been an incredible experience. Becoming familiar with Iowa City and getting to know the students and staff has been wonderful. Thus far, the highlight of my time in Iowa has definitely been the ISAHL golf outing. On September 12, most of the students and staff, as well as many alumni, gathered at Brown Deer Golf Club. Despite the rain and 40-degree temperatures, my group finished all 18 holes. Having played on the golf team in high school, I had hopes of finishing near the top. However, I unfortunately finished with a score of +2.

Aside from the inclement weather and unexceptional score, I had a great time getting to know my classmates, especially the guys in my foursome. Many of my classmates had a great time bonding as well. The golf outing proved to be an invaluable experience for many students who participated. Even those of us who spent the day in the clubhouse sheltered from the elements had a nice time conversing. Like many, I am already looking forward to next year's event.

Thank you to all alumni who came back to Iowa City for the golf outing. We appreciate all your support! I hope to see you next year.



## Witt Kieffer 2014

by Abbey Even, 2<sup>nd</sup> year MHA

Two words: fellowships and interviews. Every fall, second and third-year students apply for fellowships and prepare for phone and on-site interviews. For 10 years, Witt Kieffer executives have visited our campus to help students prepare for interviews while providing supportive feedback. It has also been an opportunity for alumni to give back to the program and participate as mock interviewers. This year, we were ready to do it again.

For two days, students divided into small groups with current health care professionals (Witt Kieffer reps or alumni) to participate in mock phone and face-to-face interviews while fellow classmates and alumni provided positive and constructive feedback. Thanks to the honest feedback from classmates and current health care

professionals, we were able to walk away with a greater understanding of areas we were strong in and areas we could improve upon.

Additionally, we were reminded of helpful tips on how to succeed in an interview. The Witt Kieffer Seminar was a great way for us to practice our “about me” statement, answer behavioral questions, and practice nonverbals for both phone and face-to-face interviews.

A big thank you to Jim King and Karen Otto and all of the alumni who offered their time and feedback! It was much appreciated!



Steve Slessor, '08, and Karen Otto discuss the mock interview.

## First-Year Class Trip 2014 by Katie Gaudian, 1<sup>st</sup> year MHA

To Omaha and back: the tale of two states. Our morning started out with a very early drive to Des Moines. I'm not sure about the other vans, but some 90's jams were at least able to keep our driver awake on the way there.

Upon arrival, alumna Paige Wallace greeted us with an introduction of UnityPoint Health. After intriguing talks with Bill Leaver and Eric Crowell, we were able to ask alumni David Stark and Tom Mulrooney some of the questions that were weighing on our minds. We were given helpful advice for our upcoming futures. After a quick break, we were then able to tour the great things going on at Blank Children's Hospital and test our luck on top of the building on the Life Flight Helipad.

We then made our way to Clive where we visited a joint venture between the YMCA and Mercy Health Network entitled the YMCA Healthy Living Center. There we were able to discuss topics such as Accountable Care Organizations, legislative positioning, and consulting work with Sarah Coddington, Joe LeValley, Jennifer Boeff, and Sara Eide before we toured the facility with Vernon Delpesce. The five-year-old center gave us a glimpse into how beneficial coordinated care can be for patients. After making the next leg of our trip to Nebraska and settling into our hotel, we took part in an exciting discussion with Bob Ravenscroft from Bryan Health. He had some great insight into market expansion and competition.

On our second day, we started with a large group from CHI Health including Chelsea Cooling, Kristen Blum, Todd DeFreece, Chris Evans, and Kevin Nokels. We were able to enjoy introductions and an alumni panel discussion before we showed the group what we had learned so far this year during a case study. It was a chance to interact and bounce ideas off one another. We were also able to work on our problem solving skills and learn a little about prioritizing initiatives.

Our final stop of the trip was at Nebraska Orthopedic Hospital, where Tom Macy gave us an overview of the specialty hospital and its cost saving measures. It was a new perspective for a lot of the group and gave us some ideas that could potentially be implemented in other organizations.

I think we all learned a lot on this trip. Overall, two lessons naturally floated to the top: 1) we have some amazing alumni that are doing very impressive things in their careers; and 2) we all have a challenging but exciting career ahead of us in an ever-changing industry.



Todd DeFreece, '09 with a group of first year students



Matthew Belanger,  
2<sup>nd</sup> Year MHA/MBA,  
President

## Student Update: IS AHL

The Iowa Student Association of Healthcare Leaders (IS AHL) has enjoyed a fun and productive fall semester. Before I elaborate, I would like to sincerely thank our alumni for their generous contributions. Without alumni engagement, we would not be able to provide our members with professional, civic, and social opportunities that continue to add value to our education. We are very fortunate to have so much support.

Despite atrocious weather, our Annual HMP Golf Outing went very well. On September 12, more than 20 teams of students and alumni battle the cold, wind, and rain all day to post some great scores at Brown Deer Golf Course. Through donations and sponsorship, we were able to raise more than \$10,000 – much of which will be used to send our members to ACHE Congress in a few months.

In addition to our golf outing, we have coordinated mock fellowship interviews, helped local food banks with a canned food drive, and organized several other events. Our most recent event, a Thanksgiving potluck, was a huge success. Members and their families came together and enjoyed some fantastic food. It was a very enjoyable evening, and we look forward to having similar events in the spring.

As we plan for the spring semester, IS AHL is very excited to subsidize the cost of ACHE Congress for each of our members. The education and networking opportunities at Congress are valuable, and we look forward to having a strong student presence. Additional initiatives for the spring include:

- Professional Etiquette Dinner
- Chili Cook-Off
- Mock Internship Interviews
- Dr. Martin Luther King Day of Service

I would like to thank the IS AHL executive team and each of our members for making this a great year. I am very excited for the spring semester.

Matthew Belanger  
President, IS AHL  
matthew-belanger@uiowa.edu

## Department News

Several current MPH and MHA students, HMP alumni, and HMP faculty attended Rebalancing Health Care in the Heartland 7: Fulfilling the Promise of Health Care Innovation held in Des Moines on Thursday, November 20th.

The Rebalancing Health Care in the Heartland forum series facilitates a public discussion about health care in Iowa. The forums define key challenges in providing high quality health care across Iowa; assess the potential impact of contemporary economic, demographic, and political realities; debate strategies and identify viable solutions for consideration by Iowa’s policymakers; and anticipate new and emerging trends that may impact the provision of high quality health care to the people of Iowa.

The University of Iowa is proud to be the organizer of these critical and timely discussions. As a publicly supported academic institution, the University is uniquely positioned to provide a non-partisan forum for the consideration of issues of public interest and concern.

This series is hosted by the University of Iowa Health Sciences Policy Council. Information about this series is available at

<http://rebalancinghealthcare.uiowa.edu/>.



FRONT ROW: Katherine Read, Heather Gray, Nicole Westergaard, Pallavi Yadav, Evelyn Perry.  
BACK ROW: Mike Lightbody, Lance Clark, Bryan Visser, Professor Kaskie, Michael Baca, Sharese Van Sloten.



Matthew Nattinger,  
2<sup>nd</sup> year PhD student

### **Nattinger a Finalist for the Outstanding Student Poster Presentation Award at 2014 GSA Conference**

Matthew Nattinger, a 2nd year HMP PhD student, was recognized as a finalist for the Outstanding Student Poster Award at the 2014 Gerontological Society of America's (GSA) Annual Meeting in Washington, DC. The work he presented evaluated the adoption of state protection policies for persons with dementia in assisted living. His research is part of a larger, ongoing project with Professor Brian Kaskie and fellow HMP PhD student Andrew Potter that is analyzing the variation in assisted living regulatory environments across the United States.



Brad Wright, PhD

### **Understanding Racial and Geographic Disparities in Hospital Observation Care**

Over the last decade, observation care - a hospital-based outpatient service used to evaluate and treat acutely ill patients for extended periods - has become an increasingly common, but controversial, alternative to full hospitalization affecting more than one million Medicare beneficiaries annually. Proponents argue that observation care represents an alternative to short-stay hospitalization (< 48 hours) and a net cost savings to the health system, while critics argue that observation care shifts the cost burden of expensive inpatient care onto patients and may compromise the quality of care. There is also significant variation in observation care use - including racial and geographic disparities - and it is unclear both what drives these disparities and whether observation care results in better or worse patient-centered outcomes than short-stay hospitalizations. Thus, the overall objective of this study is to understand the

causes of racial and geographic disparities in the use of observation care among Medicare fee-for-service beneficiaries and the implications of these disparities for patient-centered outcomes. The proposed research is significant because it will indicate whether disparities in health outcomes could potentially be reduced by policies that address disparities in observation care use, and whether policy strategies to reduce disparities in the use of observation care should be targeted towards individuals, system-level factors, or both. The proposed research is innovative because it uses comprehensive national person-level Medicare claims data to investigate racial and geographic disparities in the use of observation care to identify both its upstream and downstream consequences, and will assess for the first time the impact of the decision to admit or observe on health outcomes. This study is expected to have an immediate positive impact on Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) policymakers, payers, providers, and hospitals as they develop policies on the appropriate use of observation care. As these policies are implemented by CMS and other payers to improve the quality of care and reduce disparities, patients will be the ultimate beneficiaries of this research.



Padmaja Ayyagari, PhD

### **Evaluating the Impact of Social Security Benefits on Health Outcomes among the Elderly**

Given concerns about the depletion of the Social Security Trust Fund, U.S. policymakers are considering several proposals that aim to improve the financial sustainability of the program. Some of these proposals would lower benefits over time. The extent to which reductions in Social Security benefits impact individual health and well-being is not well understood. This project will evaluate the impact of changes in Social Security income on a broad range of health outcomes among the elderly, including cognitive function, depression, disability and cardiovascular health. The study will also assess whether the impact of Social Security income varies by education, race and ethnicity. The project is funded by the 2014 Steven H. Sandell grant from the Social Security Administration and the Boston College Center for Retirement Research.

THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA  
COLLEGE OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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The Department of Health Management and Policy  
Alumni Newsletter can be found online at  
<http://cph.uiowa.edu/hmp-news/>



FRONT ROW: Chris Evans, '08, Tim Chwirka, '13, Kristen Blum, '13, Becky O'Rourke, '08, Nathan Thompson, '09, Eric Mooss, '04  
BACK ROW: Luke Hicks, '09, Bryan Garter, '12, Mark Willis, '12, Adam Scherling, '12