



**FALL 2010**

In celebration of the 20th anniversary of our state’s AHEC program, we are pleased to introduce “Wisconsin AHEC: On Location”—highlights of programs and people who bring teaching and learning to life in communities across the state. Suggestions for future articles are welcome; send your ideas or nominations to Keri Robbins, AHEC Communications Coordinator.

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- **Mentoring:** Summer 2010 CHIP mentor/intern pair in Wood County
- **Curriculum Development:** Community Projects, Primary Care Clerkship - Dr. John Brill
- **NEW program:** Whitehall School District’s Health Career Academy

**Profile: Wisconsin Express Site Coordinator  
Professor Chris Vandenhouten**

“I have served as the site coordinator for the past 6 years, and always feel as though I get as much or more from the experiences as the participants,” Chris Vandenhouten writes. Professor Vandenhouten (PhD, RN) organized a wide variety of engaging activities in Green Bay, one of the most successful sites for Wisconsin Express – a week-long cultural immersion program for students in health professions.

“I am forever indebted to the many wonderful mentors and agencies that open their doors to allow the participants to learn about the challenges they face and many needs of the communities.,” she emphasized. “While several experiences involve agencies that provide direct services to clients, many experiences take a ‘behind the scenes’ look at the needs of some of our most vulnerable community members. “ The behind-the-scenes reality helps to introduce health professions students to a broader perspective. Professor Vandenhouten adds: “Without shelter and food, no amount of health services will resolve a family’s health care needs.”

The jam-packed itinerary prepared by Professor Vandenhouten focuses on the three themes of diversity, disparities, and multidisciplinary teams. Students at the Green Bay site conduct a poverty simulation exercise using the online community Second Life; plan and participate in a health fair held at the Salvation Army after school program; visit a community health center for the Oneida Tribe and several health care providers serving in community health settings and public schools with diverse populations; as well as share a meal with residents of a homeless shelter.

The Second Life technology introduces students to fundamental aspects of living in poverty, such as the process of trying to find a job or access services in a virtual world with challenges similar to those in real life. Even though the engaging online format can feel fun at first, throughout the activity, students often encounter frustration. “I hope



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that through the poverty simulation, students gain an appreciation for the really difficult choices that individuals who live in poverty are facing ... and (learn how to) help connect people to resources, who otherwise wouldn't be connected to them," Professor Vandenhouten explains.

Professor Vandenhouten's students describe the week as "life changing." She shared her perspective about its impact on students who attend the Green Bay session, as well as students from the UW Green Bay Nursing program who attend Wisconsin Express in other locations: all find the experience tremendously meaningful. "Even years after the fact, I often hear from participants who say how the experience impacted their understanding of what it means to be vulnerable," she says. "When we look around our communities, we are usually drawn to the 'new and improved' businesses and other trendy sites. All too often we lose sight of those people who are the most vulnerable in our communities. Wisconsin Express provides a unique venue to expose students to a variety of settings and individuals whose mission is to serve the most vulnerable in our communities. It certainly takes a village to raise a child, and it also takes a team to meet the needs of that village."

The themes of Wisconsin Express closely mirror her professional interests in nursing education and vulnerable populations. She is currently an Assistant Professor at the University of Wisconsin–Green Bay. Previously, she taught at Bellin College and worked as a Public Health Nurse (Brown County) and as a staff nurse (St. Mary's Hospital, St. Vincent Hospital). She earned her PhD in Nursing from Marquette University.

"The focus on diversity, disparities, and teams is a perfect fit.," concludes Professor Vandenhouten. "There is nothing more gratifying than reading the students' reflections and hearing them discuss how the experience will forever change their professional practice. This is an educator's dream!"

Read more about Chris Vandenhouten; see her UW-Green Bay faculty profile:  
<http://www.uwgb.edu/nursing/whyuwgb/faculty/vandenhouten.asp>

## Community Health Internship Program: "CHIP" Wood County CHIP Team: Nutrition Efforts Bear Fruit



Dressing up like a bunch of grapes and handing out free fruit samples to grocery store shoppers wasn't necessarily in the fine print of her job description. Yet Paj Ntaub Vang gamely donned a fruit costume on several occasions – among other unusual activities that raised awareness of healthy food choices for the local community during a summer internship with Wisconsin AHEC's CHIP program (Community Health Internship Program).

Paj Ntaub, known as "Pajin," was paired with mentor Kristie Rauter in the Wood County Health Department. Kristie's CHIP proposal requested an intern to assist with improving the availability of healthy foods and beverages and increasing opportunities for physical activity in Wood County, working with the Healthy People Wood County Obesity Prevention Team on a grant through the CDC called "Communities Putting Prevention to Work." The team experienced positive results.

Throughout the course of the 8-week CHIP internship, Pajin and Kristie implemented numerous strategies designed to introduce or reinforce the concept of nutritious food choices and health promotion. In addition to providing free samples of fresh fruit, they produced and posted a video on YouTube, submitted a letter to the editor that was published in the local newspaper, and hosted preschoolers on field trips to the fresh produce aisle to

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learn about fruits and vegetables and do some taste testing. They also conducted health inspections, surveys of WIC program participants, and other routine health department activities.

“Once I got the hang of things, I was able to put my input into projects and decide what I wanted to do and what I could do best,” Pajin wrote. “I just finished Wood County’s public health video, which is now online. With this I was able to use my hobby of movie making, and passion for health to advocate public health.”

The mentor/intern team developed a close relationship over the course of the summer. Pajin told us that she appreciated Kristie’s willingness to help her find housing in Wisconsin Rapids for the summer. Making new connections in the local community, or renewing old ties, is among the intangible related benefits to CHIP interns.

“Not only did I gain knowledge and experience, but also life long friends,” Pajin said. “Everyone here is so friendly and hard working, driven and passionate about what they do. They are motivating and are definitely inspiring. I had a LOT of FUN, maybe too much fun. I wish there was more time so that I could accomplish so much more.”

Pajin earned her bachelor’s degree in biology with a certificate in gender and women’s studies, and completed undergraduate research in obesity and nutrition. She is currently working toward a Masters in Public Health at the University of Wisconsin-Madison as well as doing coalition work with the Hmong Health Council. Pajin is from Appleton, Wisconsin. She definitely plans to continue in health-related work, and specifically hopes to pursue an MD and go into Obstetrics and Gynecology. Though she is unlikely to reprise her role as a bunch of grapes, her efforts in this area will continue to bear fruit for many years to come.



**Related materials:**

Video - Wood County’s “What is Public Health”: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SV54vxdZkB0>

Newspaper clipping – Pajin’s editorial: [http://www.ahec.wisc.edu/CHIP/WoodCounty\\_Pajin\\_newsclipping.pdf](http://www.ahec.wisc.edu/CHIP/WoodCounty_Pajin_newsclipping.pdf)

## Primary Care Clerkships: Community Projects Help Students Recognize Need to Communicate Differently

“My involvement with AHEC and with the CHIP program has helped shape a vision for the PCC projects,” writes John Brill (MD, MPH), whose roles include Associate Professor - Family Medicine; Medical Director - Aurora School-Based Health Team; Director - UWSMPH Primary Care Clerkship; as well as serving on the Milwaukee AHEC Board of Directors.



Third-year medical students completing their rotation through primary care (family medicine, pediatrics, and internal medicine) are now required to complete a community project. “The projects developed out of the transformation process to a School of Medicine and Public Health,” explains Dr. Brill. “We desired to add a curricular element that would require the students to think beyond the individual patients that they were seeing, to create something that would be useful to a broader population.”

The focus on public health is a natural result; more surprising was the innovative approach to establishing the

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new curriculum. "A feature that I would like to emphasize is that students were involved in creating the options for the project and the evaluation process," Dr. Brill adds.

Students focus their project on the specific needs of the community and clinic where they are conducting their primary care clerkship. Under the guidance of the preceptor, the students identify a need and develop an appropriate project that results in a tangible product such as a handout, presentation, report, or column as well as an oral presentation which focuses on the community and process aspects of the project, not the medical issues. Recent project examples included creating a simplified patient education handout for insulin; submitting a letter to a local newspaper describing the benefits of its community health clinic, framed in the context of health care reform; and speaking to a fifth grade class about incorporating fitness activities into their lives to stay healthy.

### Health Education Activities

Walnut Way Conservation Corp. (Spring 2010)



- Lesson plans with learning objectives
  - Nutrition
  - Physical activity
  - Childcare
  - Healthcare careers
- Hands-on, group-oriented activities
- Products of learning to share with families and community

Prepared by Kjersti Knox and Katie Fritz (used with permission)

Dr. Brill describes one of the benefits of the new curriculum. "I think that the most important outcome to date, and what I have heard over and over from the students, is that the projects have required them to think differently about the language they use for written and verbal communication. They have realized that they need to re-learn to communicate on different levels-- more visual, more simple, less jargon."

Undoubtedly, the PCC curriculum will continue to develop and evolve. Dr. Brill indicates that equitable evaluation of the projects remains one of the challenges across the various community sites. Another opportunity is the potential for collaborative work; in addition to strengthening skill in working in teams, collaboration would also foster different types of projects.

"Over the next two to three years, I would like to see the projects evolve to include teams of students working together and ongoing relationships with community organizations," Dr. Brill says. "Partnering with the regional AHEC systems could allow a deeper integration into the health of the local sites."

**Read more about the PCC community project curriculum:**

<http://www.fammed.wisc.edu/sites/default/files//webfm-uploads/documents/med-student/pcc/community-project-assignment.pdf>

## Health Career Academy Welcomes Inaugural Class

WHITEHALL - Wisconsin State Senator Kathleen Vinehout spoke at Tri-County Memorial Hospital to the inaugural eight-member class of the Whitehall School District Health Career Academy. A two-year local planning effort created the academy, which received state grants through the Scenic Rivers AHEC (Area Health Education Center), based in Cashton. The Health Career Academy includes an introduction to health careers and a sequence of more-rigorous coursework in human diseases and biochemistry. Students begin as freshmen and will continue through their senior year.

(Pictured: Sen. Vinehout and incoming students.)



## Additional news and AHEC program updates at:

<http://www.ahec.wisc.edu>