Dr. Lisa Chasan-Taber, Associate Professor in Epidemiology has received a $87,000 grant starting May 1st as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. This grant is a supplement to her NIH grant “An Exercise Intervention to Prevent GDM” whose major aims are to investigate the effects of a motivationally-targeted, individually tailored 12-wk physical activity intervention on 1) risk of GDM, 2) serum biomarkers associated with insulin resistance, 3) and the adoption and maintenance of exercise during pregnancy using a clinical trial design. The overall goal of the administrative supplement is to achieve more quickly the goals of this clinical trial through the hiring of additional personnel, thereby accelerating the tempo of this funded project as well as promoting job creation. Dr. Chasan-Taber was also invited to speak on “Prevention of Gestational Diabetes Mellitus” (GDM) at GDM Pasadena II, an international scientific conference in Pasadena, Calif. from April 8–10. Her postdoctoral student, Dr. Renee Turzanski Fortner, also attended and presented a poster, “Acculturation and risk of gestational diabetes.” Leading experts in diabetes and reproductive health from around the world presented state-of-the-science research findings and participated in interactive panel discussions at the three-day gathering. An emerging theme of the conference, according to organizers, is early life influences on later health, and what we can do about it.


The Annual End of the Year Bio-Epi Party took place this past Friday, May 7th, at the residence of Dr. Edward Stanek (Dr. Stanek is a Professor in Biostatistics and Chair of the Department of Public Health). Students, faculty, and staff members of the Division of Biostatistics and Epidemiology attended with their families to celebrate the end of the academic year and enjoyed a variety of foods and desserts prepared by the faculty members in addition to volleyball and badminton matches and conversation. During the festivity, first and second year Master students received awards for best achievement in their respective programs.

This year’s winners were:

**Biostatistics**
- 1st Year: Yiwei Jiang
- 2nd Year: Shan Chen

**Epidemiology**
- 1st Year: Mairi Thomson
- 2nd Year: Marushka Silveira

**Congratulations!**

On April 20, 2010, Mairi Thomson attended an inaugural lecture for the Desmond Tutu Public Health Awareness Series with Dean Aelion and Dr. Gerber. In the following paragraphs, she shares with us her experience there:

"His joy in our diversity and his spirit of forgiveness are as much part of his immeasurable contribution to our nation as his passion for justice and his solidarity with the poor"

--- Nelson Mandela at Desmond Tutu’s retirement, 1996

When I received the invitation to attend a dinner with Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, I was overwhelmed at the possibility and thought about how ironic it was that the opportunity of meeting this iconic South African came when I was thousands of miles away from home.

For those who may be unfamiliar with Desmond Tutu, in 1984 he became the second South African to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. This prestigious honor recognized his role in the ‘campaign to solve South Africa’s apartheid problem by peaceful means’ He has subsequently garnered numerous awards and honorary degrees for his part in the liberation struggle and tireless work to promote health and human rights throughout the world.

Tutu came to Springfield to give the inaugural lecture for The Desmond Tutu Public Health Awareness Series, an annual series to promote public health awareness using the transformative power of teaching and ideas. The series is supported by American International College (AIC) and Medical Knowledge International (MKI), the latter being a non profit organization based in the Netherlands and United State dedicated to improving the quality of healthcare and promoting humanitarian values through education and public health programs. At the ceremony, Tutu along with UMass, Amherst adjunct faculty, Dr Peter Bittel received honorary degrees from American International College. We had the privilege of also attending the reception dinner at the Grand Sheraton in Springfield that evening.

At 79 years of age, Tutu is still a tireless campaigner and activist for AIDS treatment, poverty eradication, human rights and racism. An ambassador for multiple generations, he is an inspiration to millions around the globe. During his lecture, his vibrance was overwhelming; he is a tiny, jovial man with a sprightly step, expressive face and booming voice. He was able to joke at himself, remain humble about his achievement and the audience sat in awe as he spoke.

I was a little disappointed with the content of the lecture, as I had imagined he would tackle some hard-hitting issues, such as the struggles in post-apartheid South Africa or the devastating impact of HIV/AIDS. Instead, most of his speech focused on the important work of MKI and AIC with minimal discussion of critical public health issues. I do believe, however, that this was not the correct forum for the airing of those political views and Tutu is evidently as wise in person as history has proven.

It was indeed a proud moment for me as a South African to say that I witnessed such an incredible man in person.

We were not all able to meet the Archbishop personally, but it was heartwarming to hear that he gave each member of the high school band who performed for him a great big hug – a small reminder of Nelson Mandela’s regard for the man who gives a ‘voice to the voiceless’.

--- Mairi Thomson (Epi)
The 13th Annual Research Day took place this past Monday, April 26th, 2010 at the Campus Center Auditorium. It is an event co-sponsored by the University of Massachusetts School of Public Health and Health Sciences and the Rho Chapter of the Delta Omega honorary Public Health Society. On this day, undergraduate and graduate students from the departments of Nutrition, Public Health, Communication Disorders, and Kinesiology gather to share their research with peers and the UMass community at large. The winner of this year’s Research Day was Kristine Lynch, a doctoral student in epidemiology, from the Department of Public Health. Her research titled “Chronic Alcohol Consumption and Reproductive Hormones” examined how habitual, moderate alcohol consumption affected reproductive hormones across the menstrual cycle. Prior research has shown an association between acute alcohol consumption and menstrual disturbances such as irregular cycles and amenorrhea. Her research showed alcohol intake to be negatively associated with LH levels at the time of expected ovulation. She will be presenting her poster at the American Public Health Association Annual Meeting this fall.

The following abstracts will be presented by Bio-Epi faculty members and students at this year’s Society of Epidemiologic Research (SER) and Society for Pediatric and Perinatal Epidemiologic Research (SPER):

**SER/SPER Abstracts**

**SER: Physical Activity at different ages and incidence of premenstrual syndrome.** (SER) E. Bertone-Johnson, S. Hankinson, S. Johnson, and J. Manson


**SPER: Are Dietary Intakes of Calcium, Vitamin D, or Dairy Products Associated with Adiposity in Young Women?** (SPER) AA Addo, ER Bertone-Johnson, S. Zagarins, AG Ronnenberg

**SPER: Prenatal Stress, Anxiety, and Depressive Symptoms as Predictors of Breastfeeding Intention among Hispanic Women.** (SPER) TZ Insaf, RT Fortner, P. Fekow, N. Dole, G. Markenson, L. Chasan-Taber

**SPER: Flexible, efficient biomarker assay calibration designs.** (SER) NJ Perkins, BW Whitcomb, BF Schisterman

**SPER: Chronic alcohol consumption and reproductive hormones (SPER).** K. Lynch, BW Whitcomb, SL Mumford, AD Gaskins, J. Wactawski-Wende, BF Schisterman

**SPER: The association between bully victimization and suicide behaviors among youth in Massachusetts (SPER).** S. Fernando, S. Ramisetty-Mikler, BW Whitcomb, E. Puleo

**SPER: Psychosocial Stress and Risk of Hypertensive Pregnancy among Hispanic Women.** (SER, SPER) RF Fortner, P. Fekow, G. Markenson, C. Solomon, L. Chasan-Taber

**SPER: Physical Activity and Risk of Preterm Delivery among Hispanic Women.** (SER, SPER) RT Fortner, P. Fekow, G. Markenson, L. Chasan-Taber


**Other Abstracts and Conferences:**

**SER: Premenstrual Syndrome, Menstrual Symptoms, and C-Reactive Protein Levels in College-Aged Women.** Elizabeth Bertone-Johnson, Brian Whitcomb, Biki Takashima, Sofija Zagarins, Patricia Chocano-Bedoya, A. Ronnenberg.

**SPER: Society for Behavioral Neuroendocrinology meeting, July 2010**

**ACOG's 58th Annual Clinical Meeting (ACM) 2010**

**ACOG's 58th Annual Clinical Meeting (ACM) 2010**

**Women's Health 2010: 18th Annual Congress 2010**

Sima Blank (Epi) and Lori Crawford (Epi) will be traveling to Novgorod (Velikiy), Russia this summer to work with medical students and faculty at the Novgorod State University.
Since graduating, Renée has been a postdoctoral fellow at the UMass SPHHS Division of Biostatistics and Epidemiology, managing the day-to-day operations of Dr. Lisa Chasan-Taber’s studies and also serving as a lecturer, teaching both undergraduate and graduate level courses.

6 questions we asked Renée:
If you could meet anyone (dead or alive), who would it be and why?
“I have always admired Marie Curie. She was the first woman scientist I was exposed to as a child, and was the first woman to win the Nobel Prize.”

What profession other than your own would you like to attempt?
“Midwife.”

If someone wrote a biography about you, what do you think the title would be?
“The little epidemiologist that could.”

What is the last book you read?
“Does the Biology of Cancer count? If not, then Plain Truth by Jodi Picoult.”

What is your best memory of UMass?
“I always really enjoyed the annual bio/epi get-togethers at the end of the year.”

If you could turn back the clock, what is something you wish you had known during your years as a student?
“You don’t always have to have the right answer! Speak up in class, ask questions, and don’t be afraid to have the wrong answer ... or at least one different than was expected.”

After 5 years at UMass Amherst, Renée has accepted a 2 year postdoctoral position with the Nurse’s Health Study (NHS) at Harvard University and will be leaving UMass at the end of June. She will be working in the area of reproductive cancers under the direction of Dr. Susan Hankinson. NHS is one of the largest and longest running investigations of factors influencing women’s health, with 121,000 nurse-participants since 1976 and an additional 117,000 since 1989, with prevention of cancer being its primary focus. We wish Renée the best and are grateful for the help and insight she provided for the Graduate Society of Epidemiology and Biostatistics as well as to the Epi-Bio Portal newsletter over the last year.

graduating students

Master of Science in Biostatistics:
Yan Qiao
Kelly M. Strait

Master of Science in Epidemiology:
Aimee Kroll

Master of Public Health in Epidemiology:
Nisha Kini
Alexander Nits
Chinyelu Nwasike
Aditya Raghunathan
Gayathri Raghuraman
Sujan Ravi
Marushka L. Silveira
Ambooj Tiwari
Lora Wolski

*NOTE: For more information, please visit the Epi Bio Portal website!
http://people.umass.edu/beportal