A Message from the Lab Director

Greetings! Welcome to our Fall 2021 newsletter!

The Family and Population Health (FPH) Laboratory consists of a group of scholars across disciplines at MSU who study how family and life course processes impact and are impacted by health and well-being. FPH provides a vibrant research and training environment for faculty and graduate students to learn about how family dynamics and processes unfold over time to shape the experiences of health and illness. Our work has never been timelier – over the past year, the COVID-19 pandemic has created serious challenges for our families, societies, and professions. I am truly proud of what our students and faculty have accomplished during this difficult period. Despite the pandemic, the FPH lab is thriving, and great things are afoot. As a group, we have continued our monthly meetings and supported one another throughout these challenging times. To that end, we successfully held the 6th Annual MSU Medicine, Health, and Society Seminar this past year in a virtual format and we look forward to the next exciting iteration of this event in the Spring of 2022.

I invite you to read this newsletter as it contains information about the adventures, ground-breaking projects, publications, and accomplishments of current FPH members and alumni over the past year. Finally, an enormous thanks to Gerald Roman Nowak III and Karessa Weir for producing this newsletter. They put this publication together in the midst of all their other important activities during the summer and we are all deeply grateful for their time and effort. Please enjoy the newsletter and share it widely within your professional networks!

Hui (Cathy) Liu
FPH Director and Professor of Sociology

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Gerald Nowak III named FPH Lab Coordinator for 2021-2022

We are pleased to announce that Gerald R. Nowak III will be assuming the role of FPH Lab Coordinator. In addition to being responsible for scheduling monthly workshops and organizing lab activities, he will work with Dr. Liu and other FPH members in conducting research. Prior to beginning of his doctoral studies at Michigan State, Mr. Nowak earned his Master of Arts in sociology at Wayne State University in the Spring of 2019. In his time with the lab, Mr. Nowak aspires to gain the knowledge and skills that are required to compete for a tenure-system faculty position at an R1 doctoral university. He is most interested in the study of demographic disparities relating to mental illness and loneliness. In fact, for his forthcoming dissertation, Mr. Nowak plans to evaluate the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the mental and emotional wellbeing of aging populations.

Yan Zhang named Post-Doctoral Research Associate at University of Wisconsin (Madison)

The Family and Population Health Laboratory is proud to announce that Yan Zhang, our former graduate student coordinator, has been hired by the University of Wisconsin – Madison. She will continue her career as a postdoctoral research associate at the Center for Demography of Health and Aging. Having served as Dr. Liu’s research assistant from 2018 through May of 2021, Yan Zhang acknowledges the impact of the FPH lab on her career. When asked about what distinguished FPH from other organizations, she said, “The lab is a space where students and faculty interact with one another as colleagues. Because of this dynamic, I have the confidence to engage senior-level faculty in other settings, such as conferences and at my new place of employment.”

The FPH Lab is Accepting New Students

The Family and Population Health Laboratory is a space wherein students and faculty work in partnership in the analysis of population-level data. While some of the core themes of our research are sociological in nature, we are an interdisciplinary organization. The FPH lab is currently admitting students and faculty who are interested in exploring such social phenomena as mental, physical and cognitive health, family, gender and sexuality, social networks, health disparities, and aging and the life course. If you are interested in any topics related to the above areas and would enjoy collaborating with like-minded scholars, we invite you to reach out to us. For more information on joining FPH, please contact lab director Dr. Hui Liu at liuh@msu.edu.

Visit our website at https://sociology.msu.edu/research/liu-research.html
This fall, there will be a resumption of many on-campus activities. What aspect of in-person work are you most excited about?

Dr. Ning Hsieh: I’m most excited about reducing Zoom meeting time and talking to people face-to-face. I also look forward to traveling to conferences and catching up with folks from different places. But maybe I will miss working in my sweatpants all the time too.

BC: I think I’m most excited about seeing people in person! I miss the days when fun random/serendipitous interactions would be really fun, intellectually engaging, and even lead to new collaborative research. That and not having a bottomless stash of Sour Patch Kids within arm’s reach, like it currently is.

Dr. Bill Chopik: It has been nearly a year and a half since students, faculty, and staff alike were asked to perform their work from home. How did the switch to remote work shape your approach to research, teaching, and/or service?

NH: I have tried my best to adapt everything to the virtual format—doing interviews online, teaching statistics online, and attending all meetings online, etcetera. I know that something is missing in the virtual space, but I appreciate that our work can still be carried on remotely.

BC: Having everything virtual has disrupted my habits down on some of these spontaneous moments, but we’re trying to recapture them. For teaching, I had to change up my style. When you’re in person, you often have a captive audience. But online, people are often combating more distractions or fatigue from sitting at their computer all day. So, I’ve tried to give students extra resources and guidance to help them along through this period. I’ve also upped the number of “vad jokes,” which . . . I’m not sure is helping the situation.

The academic job market has become very competitive in the last few decades and there is a possibility that the pandemic will exacerbate this trend. What advice would you give to a graduate student who wishes to pursue a career as a tenure-system faculty member?

ZL: I am interested in the underlying drivers of racial and ethnic disparities in mental health and cognitive health in late life. My research addresses how the unequal distribution of social supports such as financial stress, minority stress and relationship strain bear an influence on health outcomes. More importantly, I examine how these various types of support shape mental health and cognitive health disparities defined professional and academic goals.

JO: It was nice to know that there were people that I could contact when I needed help. Since Yan has just recently been on the job market, she has been sending me information and materials that relate to this new phase of her career – as well as her contacts to help me navigate this new phase of my career as well. I think that our lab maintained monthly meetings and continued to support one another. During the hardest days of the pandemic, I appreciated it that our lab maintained monthly meetings and continued to support one another.

Describe the role of the lab in your life during the pandemic. Did you find the virtual meetings to be valuable?

ZL: In my time with the lab, I have developed my presentation skills in terms of the ability to communicate my research findings to a non-specialist audience. I have also honed my skills in hands-on experience working with lab members, especially in advanced quantitative methods, coding, modeling, data management, and analysis of population-level data. In addition, publication and collaboration play significant parts in Ph.D. training; however, not every graduate student has the opportunity to work with faculty as co-authors. So, it is important to note that all FPH faculty members are generous in sharing their time and talent to lend their experience in research and publication to graduate students. I am glad that I have honed my academic writing and publishing skills through the authorship opportunities with lab members instead of fumbling alone.

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What skills have you developed in your virtual role? What skills do you think you’ll need as you move into your new job?

BC: The academic job market has become very competitive in the last few decades and there is a possibility that the pandemic will exacerbate this trend. What advice would you give to a graduate student who wishes to pursue a career as a tenure-system faculty member?

NH: It was already challenging to maintain personal-professional boundaries before the pandemic. It has become even more difficult since last year. In the past year, I did almost everything from home, such as work, exercise, leisure, and virtual social events. At some point I had to make myself work only at my desk to reestablish some boundaries. Before the pandemic, on days when I worked from home, I can work on the sofa, at the dining table, or even in my bed. But I had to change that habit during the pandemic, so I stopped feeling like working 24 hours a day and never shutting down.

BC: Many people lamented that, now that we work from home, there’s more of a blur between boundaries. This is especially the case among people who have childcare responsibilities or other challenges; the pandemic hit people a lot differently and I’m privileged that it wasn’t as disruptive as it could’ve been. I get to work a bit past 5pm when I was in the office, but now I drop what I’m doing when 5pm hits and I go out for a long walk before dinner! The long walks have been great for my psyche! My consumption of Sour Patch Kids increased tenfold though; I should probably cut back.

JO: It was important to note that our lab maintained monthly meetings and continued to support one another. During the hardest days of the pandemic, I appreciated it that our lab maintained monthly meetings and continued to support one another. During the hardest days of the pandemic, I appreciated it that our lab maintained monthly meetings and continued to support one another. During the hardest days of the pandemic, I appreciated it that our lab maintained monthly meetings and continued to support one another. During the hardest days of the pandemic, I appreciated it that our lab maintained monthly meetings and continued to support one another. During the hardest days of the pandemic, I appreciated it that our lab maintained monthly meetings and continued to support one another. During the hardest days of the pandemic, I appreciated it that our lab maintained monthly meetings and continued to support one another. During the hardest days of the pandemic, I appreciated it that our lab maintained monthly meetings and continued to support one another.
FPH ACCOMPLISHMENTS 2020-2021

Molly Copeland received the Provost’s Office Award for the National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity’s Faculty Success Program.

Hui Liu was awarded the GenCen 2021 Inspiration Award.

Bill Chopik was awarded the Early Career Award (Association for Research in Personality), the Margaret M. and Paul B. Baltes Award in Behavioral and Social Gerontology, and the GSA Age Alive Research in Aging Award (Michigan State University).

FPH MEMBER 2020-2021 PUBLICATIONS


ALUMNI UPDATES

Seung-won Emily Choi (Assistant Professor of Sociology, Texas Tech University) who graduated with a PhD from Michigan State’s sociology program in 2019, has published an astounding six peer-reviewed articles this year. Said Choi of this accomplishment, “I have published my dissertation chapters and worked on dementia and COVID-19 related topics lately. I have greatly benefited from our lab’s rigorous training and collaborations. [The lab’s] support to students also inspired me a lot to be a better researcher and teacher. So proud to be an alumna of the FPH lab!”

Shannon Shen (Assistant Professor of Sociology, Texas A&M University-San Antonio) received a $77,000 grant from the Meadows Foundation to support her work on the Student Health and Success Initiative (SHASI). SHASI collects data to examine interactions among social, behavioral, cognitive, and biophysical factors and academic success in first-time freshmen college students, particularly Mexican American students. SHASI is housed at Texas A&M University – San Antonio, but includes researchers at Texas A&M University – Kingsville and the University of Texas at Rio Grande Valley in the fields of kinesiology, sociology, psychology, and education. Dr. Shen was also invited to be a Fellow with the National Social Life and Aging Project (NSHAP) Fellows Program for 2021-2023. The NSHAP Fellows Program is a two-year fellowship for scholars currently producing high quality publications utilizing the NSHAP dataset. This fellowship recognizes outstanding scholarship using NSHAP data and potential for collaboration with NSHAP Investigators, NORC researchers, and Graduate Research Assistants.