

The Official USU Newsletter

the pulse

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Photo by Thomas Balfour

On the cover

First-year students at the F. Edward Hébert School of Medicine learned about Civil War medicine at Antietam National Battlefield, site of the bloodiest one-day battle in American history. Read more on page 6.

USU launches new 'Groundbreakers' web page

by Christine Creenan-Jones, editor



Photo by Christine Creenan-Jones

Army Col. (Dr.) Jeff Hutchinson, chief diversity officer at the F. Edward Hébert School of Medicine, was integral in launching the Groundbreakers web page on the USU website.

The Uniformed Services University is filled with exceptional people from all walks of life. These innovators, overachievers and self-starters work in USU's labs, classrooms and offices. Each has a unique story to tell about their road to academia, research or public service, and Army Col. (Dr.) Jeff Hutchinson, chief diversity officer at the F. Edward Hébert School of Medicine, wants to hear them all.

As CDO, Hutchinson is spearheading diversity efforts to promote inclusivity at USU through vehicles that jumpstart conversations about diversity.

"The university recently launched a Groundbreakers web page. It features USU personnel who've overcome incredible odds to accomplish extraordinary feats," Hutchinson said. "The new showcase includes USU 'groundbreakers' from diverse backgrounds, socioeconomic classes and cultures with life experiences that offer unique perspectives about what it takes to succeed."

For 'groundbreaker' Air Force 2nd

Lt. Helal Syed, hard work and perseverance were the keys to his success.

Despite growing up in a family with modest financial means, Syed excelled academically and received a scholarship to attend Harvard University. After earning his bachelor's degree, Syed was accepted into the F. Edward Hébert School of Medicine.

"Throughout my life, people considered me a stereotype, but I thought of myself as a prototype. I set the bar for others to follow," he said.

Other inspiring stories about USU's faculty, staff and students are also featured on the Groundbreakers Website at <http://www.usuhs.edu/groundbreakers/>.

"We're off to a good start but would like to hear from as many people as possible because the university believes every voice and experience is valuable," said Hutchinson. "That's why we're imploring others at USU to share their success stories by sending a brief personal narrative to outreach@usuhs.edu."

First EMDP2 students: Living the dream

by MC3 Laura Bailey, writer and photographer

A small group of service members gathered around a table with smiles so big one might think they had just won the lottery. Although they didn't win the lottery, it certainly felt that way to them. They were the first ten active duty service members to be selected for the Enlisted to Medical Degree Preparatory Program at the Uniformed Services University, and for them, it was a dream come true.

The university partnered with the armed services and George Mason University to develop and implement EMDP2, a new 24-month program currently offered through the Air Force and Army that enables highly-qualified enlisted service members to complete the preparatory coursework for application to medical school while maintaining active-duty status.

"I had known for a long time that I wanted to become a physician," said Tech. Sgt. Charles Mears, a charter member of EMDP2.

The ability to remain on active duty while chasing his dream of becoming a physician was "a match made in heaven," according to Mears. The EMDP2 presents a unique opportunity for service members who have an interest in the medical field regardless of their job classification rating.

"I've always wanted to do medical but I came in as an air traffic controller because it was a good job and it was challenging," said Tech. Sgt. Lindsay Slimski, a fellow EMDP2 member. "Before I even joined the military, I was going to school for premed at the University of Illinois."

Benefits of the program include the ability to remain on active duty while focusing completely on school without having to balance a full-time job. Additionally, EMDP2 participants receive full benefits and pay as full-time students in the program.

"I didn't know about the program," said Tech. Sgt. Kenneth Johnson, the former non-commissioned officer in charge of Microbiology at Wright Patterson Air Force Base. "Another NCO, Sgt. Cass Vaughn,



Photo on left by Cathy Hennell

Photo on right by MC3 Laura Bailey

The Army and Air Force each selected five service members for the Enlisted to Medical Degree Preparatory Program at the Uniformed Services University. EMDP2 enables highly-qualified enlisted soldiers and airmen to complete preparatory coursework for application to medical school while maintaining active-duty status. Althea Green Dixon (center, right photo) is the director of Recruitment and Outreach for the F. Edward Hébert School of Medicine. Dixon played a lead role in launching EMDP2 at USU.

told me about it in the hallway. He said, 'I know you're trying to become a doctor,' and he told me about EMDP2 where enlisted guys can become physicians. I was like, 'Man, stop lying!'" Johnson said. "After that I looked it up, I immediately knew I had to put in my package."

The EMDP2 applicants had approximately six weeks to submit their packages for approval, and some had to take the American College Testing exam in order to qualify, which made applying a rigorous, time-sensitive undertaking.

"It definitely demonstrated to me their level of commitment," said Althea Green Dixon, director of Recruitment and Outreach for the F. Edward Hébert School of Medicine at USU. "Their ability not only to find a testing location, but also to perform well on such short notice – that says something about their character and commitment and abilities."

Still, the tight lead time did not dissuade applicants

...continued

...First EMPD2 students continued

from applying.

“I can’t tell you the exact number of applicants but based on the volume of calls and e-mails that I received from the force in general, there is a tremendous amount of interest in this program from across all of the services,” said Dixon, a retired Army command sergeant major. “It is something that’s been talked about for a long time, certainly since my time in the military.”

The charter EMPD2 class started their coursework on Aug. 25 at George Mason University, where in addition to courses in biology, chemistry and physics, they also began preparing for the Medical College Admission Test. They will submit admissions applications to USU after their first year in EMPD2.

“This is one of those things that I always thought was possible for me and just never had the opportunity,” said Staff Sgt. Matthew Little. “The EMPD2 is that conduit to come here. It’s just incredible.”

Little’s classmates agree.

“We get to be the first ones to pioneer this program,” said Johnson. “We get to set the bar, and if you give us an inch, we’ll just blow the door wide open for everyone who comes up behind us.”

With the support of their families, the university and each other, a new chapter is unfolding for the charter class and USU as a whole.

“To be the inaugural class – that’s a pretty steep honor,” said Staff Sgt. Joe Merfeld. “This is a life change for us. This is a pinch-yourself, golden-ticket, winning-the-lottery kind of opportunity that we’ve embarked on. I still wake up at night and think I must be dreaming.”

USU staff member makes global impact

by Christine Creenan-Jones, editor



Courtesy photo

NaShieka Knight, a recruitment and admissions specialist at the Uniformed Services University, travelled to a girls’ school in Botswana to speak to local children about the importance of completing their education.

NaShieka Knight, a recruitment and admissions specialist at the F. Edward Hébert School of Medicine, spends the bulk of her workday discussing the unique scholarship opportunities available at America’s Medical School. In doing so, Knight has visited dozens of U.S. cities and spoken with hundreds of prospective medical students.

Whether close to home or far away, Knight always talks about USU with the same easy conviction of a person who believes in her message.

“I’m proud to work here. After all, USU graduates take care of the men and women who serve and defend our country. They’re heroes healing heroes,” she said.

But USU’s military officers aren’t the only heroes on campus. In fact, some might consider Knight one because she volunteers as a youth mentor, ordained minister and women’s advocate.

“If I can help someone, even in a small way, it makes me feel good. I get a lot of joy out of seeing people’s lives change for the better,” Knight said.

Although Knight was born and raised in Maryland, her volunteerism runs the international gamut. In fact, she recently attended a women’s empowerment summit in Senegal with the Give 1 Project, an inter-

national organization that encourages young leaders to create strong, healthy communities through economic development.

“In Senegal, our goal was to inspire local women to start businesses, run for office, engage in technology and explore other professional avenues they may not have previously considered,” she said. “Personally, my hope is for all women to live by choice, not default.”

In the past, Knight’s volunteerism also led her to Ghana, South Africa, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Israel, Jordan and Guyana. On these trips, Knight rolled up her sleeves to clean schools, dig trenches, speak to students, attend conferences to promote education, improve living conditions and reduce disparity in developing nations.

While Knight’s service is driven by an intrinsic desire to give back, she’s simultaneously pursuing a lifelong dream of eventually becoming a U.S. ambassador.

“I love my country and want people in other nations to have the same opportunities we do. As an ambassador, perhaps I could help make that happen with help from international leaders,” she said. “By volunteering, I’ve already made a lot of really great connections, which I believe brings me one step closer to my goal.”

Student makes USU history before classes begin

by Christine Creenan-Jones, editor

Five years ago, Army Sgt. Julie Bytnar was leading a very different life. Back then, she was a homemaker, living in the suburbs of Chicago while her husband, Bill, earned most of the family's income.

Then, without warning, Bill became very ill after a rare blood-clotting disorder ravaged his body. Over time, his condition deteriorated and Bill could no longer work. Their bills began piling up with no reprieve in sight.

Julie, desperate to keep hope alive, enlisted in the military so she could take care of her husband and young children.

"Although I was eligible for a commission based on my education and work experience, the lead time would have been much longer, and I needed a career right away," she said. "So I enlisted in 2009 at 38 years old and have been learning about the Army from the bottom up ever since."

Although her uniformed career has been short, Julie's military indoctrination was the swift, no-holds-barred kind. After proving herself at garrison duty assignments as a lead healthcare specialist, Julie deployed to Afghanistan in 2011.

"It was an intense experience. I provided a lot of hands-on care to wounded service members and local Afghans, treating everything from minor to life threatening injuries," she said.

Julie's experience in Afghanistan also changed her career focus. Instead of simply providing care, Julie began thinking about the bigger picture and wondering how she could prevent injuries from happening in the first place.

Her curiosity eventually led her to the Uniformed Services University, where she broke ground as the first-ever enlisted service member to be accepted into a graduate-level program.

"Even though I was hopeful, I was still very surprised when I got my acceptance letter from USU," Julie said. "Now I'm working toward a Master of Public Health. I already have a few classes under my belt. They were challenging but I feel confident I'll survive the program. I want to prove to myself and everyone else that I can do this."

Although Julie is still uncertain about her future after graduation, she has a science background and a fondness for research that's pulling her toward a specialization in epidemiology.



Photo by Thomas Balfour

Army Sgt. Julie Bytnar is the first enlisted person to be accepted into a graduate education program at the Uniformed Services University.

It's a difficult track in a rigorous program on a campus full of military officers. Still, Julie's determination is tenacious.

"The past few years have been tough but I'm more confident now than ever before," she said. "I made it through basic training with a bunch of soldiers in their late teens and early 20s. I've gone on dismounted patrols in a war zone and treated some pretty grievous injuries. Now I'm at USU. I feel like there isn't a whole lot I can't do."

Congratulations to Robert Parker for answering last issue's trivia question, "Name three occasions where medical students at the Uniformed Services University recite the Hippocratic Oath." His response, "the Welcoming Ceremony, White Coat Ceremony and Commencement" was the first correct response.

USU students learn from Battle of Antietam

by MC3 Laura Bailey, writer and photographer



Photo by Thomas Balfour

First-year medical students at the F. Edward Hébert School of Medicine visited the Antietam National Battlefield to gain a better understanding about how Civil War medicine shaped modern combat triage.

Students at the F. Edward Hébert School of Medicine at the Uniformed Services University completed a six-mile road march across the Antietam National Battlefield in Sharpsburg, Md., Aug. 21.

The field exercise, part of the first-year medical curriculum, served as an opportunity for students to learn about healthcare practices during the Battle of Antietam – the bloodiest one-day battle in American history – which took place on Sept. 17, 1862 and wounded or killed more than 23,000 men.

“That particular battle during the civil war had the greatest number of casualties in the history of America at war, whether it was with ourselves or with others,” said Senior Chief Petty Officer William Dow, the senior non-commissioned officer in charge of the Department of Military and Emergency Medicine at USU. “A lot of lessons were learned then as far as health service support and mass casualty situations, that continue to be valid for today’s military medical students when put in a modern context. The idea is to take the students out there so they can see that even though this is something that happened 152 years ago, it is still relevant today.”

During the march, Civil War experts from USU and the National Museum of Civil War Medicine presented themselves at different stations where students would stop to learn about battlefield strategies and medical aspects of the battle. The intent is for students to glean lessons from the past and carry them into their future careers as medical officers when they’re forward deployed to a combat zone and casualties overwhelm the system they have in place.

“Before this trip, I didn’t have a lot of knowledge about medical practices during the Civil War era,” said Air Force 2nd Lt. Alex Marquez, a SoM student. “I wrongly assumed that healthcare providers during that time used simple tools and worked without many of the standards of care that we have today, like the use of anesthesia. This march changed my view of historical care under fire. I came away from the march with an idea of how competent healthcare providers were trying to make sense of chaos. It was interesting to hear the lessons learned from this battle as well as how some practices performed during that time period are still being used today.”

PMB graduate students visit Army Institute of Public Health

by MC3 Laura Bailey, writer and photographer

More than 30 Preventive Medicine and Biometrics graduate students at the Uniformed Services University participated in a class field trip to the Army Institute of Public Health at Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland in July. The field trip was part of the Introduction to Environmental Health course taught by Army Lieutenant Colonels Alex Stubner and Christopher Gellasch.

The students, a combination of healthcare providers and scientists, were in the first term of various PMB master's and doctoral programs. The purpose of the trip was to show the students how AIPH provides environmental health support to military installations.

This particular field trip presented a unique opportunity because not all of the students worked in public health before starting their graduate degree programs.

"A lot of the students, especially the physicians and other healthcare providers, didn't have experience with AIPH and I wanted them to see how installation environmental health is executed," said Gellasch.

During the field trip to AIPH, students visited different stations for each of the institute's major environmental health programs: solid and hazardous waste, air pollution, surface water and wastewater, drinking water, and entomology. Students at the surface water station learned how water quality at a military facility on Kwajalein Atoll in the Pacific Ocean is impacted by hazardous waste disposal that took place more than



Photo by U.S. Army Public Health Command

Dr. Lisa Ruth, a biologist with the U.S. Army Public Health Command's Water Resources Program, explains field water support programs to students from the Uniformed Services University who visited the USAPHC to view demonstrations and exhibits as part of the Introduction to Environmental Health class at USU.

50 years ago. The AIPH scientists explained how they studied the effects on fish, the ecosystem and the health of the local population who eat fish from the area. At another station, students learned about efforts to monitor drinking water quality on Army installations.

The students learned about other aspects of environmental health, to include health risks associated with insects. Entomologists described surveillance programs to find vector-borne emerging diseases like Chikungunya, which was recently detected in the U.S. They also demonstrated traps that capture mosquitos in order to determine what diseases they carry.

"The students get a feel for how environmental health is conducted on Army installations so that when they're at a hospital or at another activity, and even if they're not in

the Army, they understand how support happens within public health," Gellasch said.

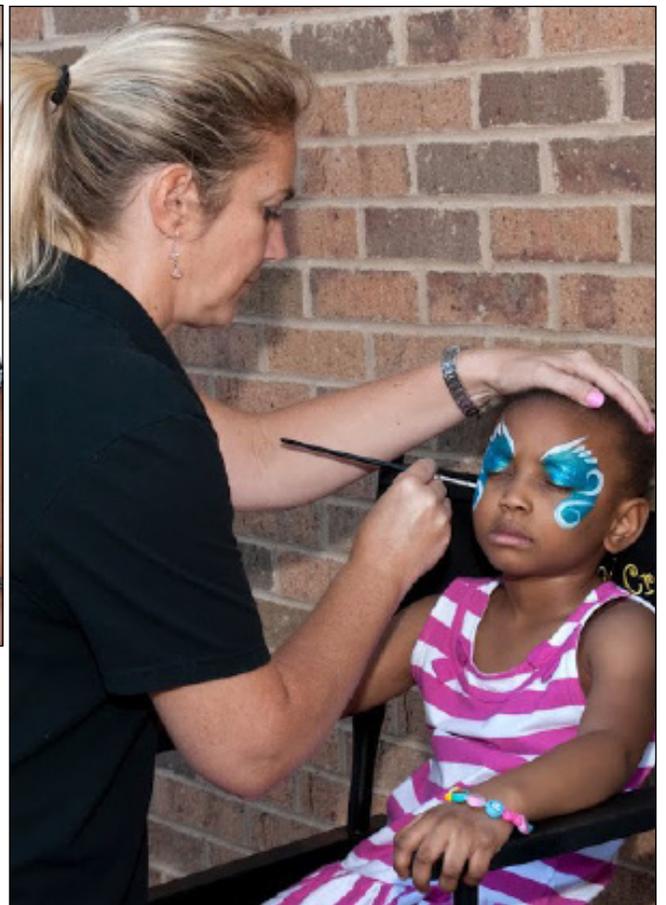
The Navy and Air Force students in the class gained a greater appreciation for how the Army provides environmental health support to installations.

"Trying to tie in these hands-on experiences on these field trips really improves learning," said Gellasch.

His feelings were echoed by several students who provided written feedback at the end of the learning experience.

"The field trips overall were fantastic. I enjoyed most of the site visits and learned a great deal about the actual operations beyond the classroom," commented one student on his evaluation form.

Final Frame



The Uniformed Services University hosted Diversity Day, Aug. 14. The family-friendly event included music, food, games and performances from around the world.

All photos by Thomas Balfour

